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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[TENDER AND TRUE.]

FATE OR FOLLY;

OR,

AN ILL-OMENED MARRIAGE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Lady Violet's Victims," "Lord Jasper's Secret," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

"TELL ME THE MYSTERY OF MY LIFE."

To feel there is no thought, no joy,
No hope nor fond desire,
Which does not answering thought and joy
And hope and wish inspire.

DJALMA never spoke as Lillian walked slowly homewards by his side; but for her all fear had ended.

"And, now, Aida, I have lost you," said the Indian, throwing himself wearily on the couch. He understood that his power over her had ceased. "And so that man is your lover?" he continued, beckoning Lillian to his side.

He noticed that the deep colour had spread itself over her neck and brow, and that she trembled from excess of feeling.

"Yes," she murmured, lifting her eyes to his.

"It must seem strange, Aida, for you to be loved," he said, slowly, panting for breath.

Her clasped hands were raised with a sudden passionate gesture.

"You speak truly. I have had so little love—so little kindness. Were I to lose him I should die."

He laughed low under his breath.

"Die! Why harp on that string? It is not so easy to die as you think. Look at me!"

He rose from his couch and flung aside the tiger-skin rug on which he usually slept.

"I was happy and contented, Aida, till I learnt to love," he said, in a hoarse, trembling voice. "I could befriend even my foes, but when I sought heaven and life in a woman's smiles, and she deceived me, then I changed. I grew jealous, harsh, and cruel."

His voice, through weakness, had assumed a strange sepulchral tone. The silver moonlight flooded the various objects in the little room in which they sat, and made a halo above Lillian's hair. She had sunk, still trembling, on her knees before him; the passion of the strange mood that was on her to-night made her wild and impulsive.

"Tell me the mystery of my life," she cried. "You have spoken more to me now than you have for days. Open your heart and reveal all. I don't think that you can have long to live, you are so weak and ill, and how can I injure you when you are dead? Oh, speak the truth to me! Tell me of my parents, my birth, my name, for the sake of the man I love."

"My child, you are getting beyond yourself," he said, gently. "I shall never reveal to you your true history. Why should I? Am I so fond of your hateful race? When did the English do aught to me and mine but harm? and I am not one of those cowards who repent at the last."

"For pity's sake," she implored, "think—

I am so young, and shall I never know of those to whom I owe my birth? Must I wander on through long years of darkness and loneliness, blighted with all sorts of suspicions? If you have committed a crime and stolen me from my home and friends, as I sometimes think you have, from the mutterings I have heard in your restless slumbers, oh, I beseech you, have mercy at the last. Confess it all to me now. Do not condemn me to wander an alien on the face of the earth. Do not strike me from your grave."

The Indian stood quiet and calm before her as she pleaded, and then he pushed her gently away; he was too weak for violence.

"A Christian might long to make a late atonement," he said, with bitter sarcasm in his tone, "but I come from a race of warriors—men who have never spared. Death is indeed near me, Aida, but I do not fear him. I have no faith, no belief, in any hereafter. It is enough for me that I have been avenged."

He stretched out his lean arm as though defying the invisible spectre at his elbow. Lillian rose from her knees, conscious that all beseeching was futile. He had all the craft, the rapacity, the cruelty of the Asiatic race; his fierce, untamed passions had been those of a savage always.

In sadness and in fear had her young days passed away with him; but an end was at hand. His mind had already begun to wander. He shook with cold, while fire burnt in his veins. He spoke of the past, of scenes of long ago, and the terrified girl listened, longing to gather some threads of information regarding herself from those indistinct murmurs.

"The fire is again in my blood," he muttered,

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turning his heavy, blood-shot eyes towards the moonlight. "Give me water to quench my thirst. I'm always thinking of the last day I saw her—just before they put her to death, she had a golden chain upon her breast. I was mad a long time after; I asked her so often to bathe my brow and she never answered—never, never. I forgot she was cold and silent. I had a horror of killing once, but why should he escape all pain? I was destructive and murderous as a snake. I waited long for my vengeance, and the child, the little golden-haired child in the garden, he called her his darling. Did he think of my lost love who had died for him in India?"

After this he seemed to doze, and Lilian, listening intently, heard him mutter with the curious fantastic colouring he sometimes gave his words fragmentary allusions to his past eastern life. Lilian's heart beat painfully, she had so hoped he might be induced to reveal something of what he knew of her parentage, but the awful demoralisation of his character, his savage, vindictive deeds, his merciless crimes did not dispose him to any late repentance.

The intensity of her love for Rupert absorbed every other feeling; it was for his sake that she wished that past had been clear. Presently the Indian rose, staggered to his feet, and came slowly across the floor where the bright moonlight rested. He wished to bathe in those silvery beams. He was willing to die. Unconscious had, indeed, already overtaken him—his eyes were closing, the sense of touch was fading.

"Give me water," he groaned, feebly, reaching out his hand. "I want to hear the running stream, to feel the foam of the sea about my limbs. This thirst is maddening; the fire of hate still burns in my breast—it has consumed me unto ashes."

He wrenched his loose garment asunder, panting for air. When Lilian returned with the water she found the Indian dead in the moonlight. He had died true to the supreme master passion of his life—hatred towards Sir Richard Allington. A wild, tameless animal, merciless as the tiger, a being whose desires were his own law, he had passed away with no fierce pangs of remorse, no terror for the unseen future. Lilian, watching this man she had so feared, was conscious of a wild sense of liberty, sweet almost as her love.

"I am free," she murmured, as a lonely prisoner might cry when the clank of the iron fetters falls from his galled limbs.

"Aida!" some one cried, from the half-opened window, "did you call? I thought I heard your voice."

She turned and saw Rupert, and in an instant she was in his arms folded to his heart.

"He is dead," said Lilian, in a hushed voice, leading her lover from the passage to the room in which the Indian lay.

Rupert looked at the face of the dead man with serious, thoughtful survey. Lilian's nerves were unstrung, shuddering sobs burst from her, and yet they were not prompted by grief or distress at the Indian's death—they were those new emotions that trembled into life under the supreme force of love.

"My darling," whispered Rupert, "why do you suffer thus? You have never had but dread for him."

Lilian sobbed from excess of joy. None could ever more divide her and Rupert—it seemed like the glad awakening from some hideous dream or night-mare of a bitter existence, as if all the absence and parting, the pain and the longing were forgotten in the sublime joy of each other's presence.

Those kisses were more eloquent than words, eyes brilliant with love's magic intoxication glowed and drooped. Rupert abandoned himself to the happiness of the moment—he will make no more efforts to forget Aida, to be coldly worldly, and remember the severe admonitions he had received from his youth upwards at Crawley Castle.

"I tried so hard to forget you," Lilian said, after a delicious pause when she nestled down

by his side, "but nothing really kills love. I used to say to myself 'He is a great gentleman, far, far above me; it is very kind of him to notice me, but it is an amusement, nothing more. And sometimes I have prayed that sooner than be nothing to you—sooner than be forgotten and fade from your view, I might be able to come to you again and die at your feet, and tell you how I cared for you, and then you might be sorry perhaps and would not quite forget me.'

Lilian had spoken all this rapidly, her exquisite arms about Rupert's neck, her golden hair bathed in the moonlight on his breast.

"Child, do you think my love shall ever hurt you?" he asked, tenderly, drawing his hand lightly over her tresses. "I loved you when I threw you the nosegays and sweets in the garden. I used to steal up to the moss-grown wall and watch your delighted look of surprise and pleasure. You are full of beauty, Aida, you are a living poem and a picture in one."

And Lilian was at peace and content. All the doubts and fears of a hopeless love had ended. Rupert was at her side and she trusted him entirely.

"Promise me, Aida," Rupert was saying, in his tense voice, as the cool fresh air surrounded them and the moon passed under a cloud, "that once again in England you will be my wife. I know and care nothing of your history. I want you, darling, for my own—just as you are, and not changed one iota."

"If I am worthy," whispered Lilian, in the sweet, odorous silence.

He bent his handsome head and kissed the little, white, ringless hand of Sir Richard Allington's only child.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BURDEN OF A SECRET.

I'd weep for thee if tears could keep
The memories of the past from me,
Or happier far if I could weep
One hour of gladness back to thee.

CLARICE never clearly remembered how she reached the hotel on the day that Dudley Ivors was taken away to prison. She loved him still, but she resented sharply from the thought of being a felon's wife; and with her agony and disgrace came the natural leaven of contempt and disgust for the man whose practised arts and skill had led her senses captive and blinded her to the dictates of honour and prudence.

"I must have been mad, tempted by his wicked wiles, enthralled by a hateful spell!" muttered Clarice, walking hurriedly along the road in the direction of Scarborough.

She believed that Dudley would keep his word to her in so far that no hint of this ill-omened marriage should escape from him. The men who arrested him did not know he was her husband; the visiting clergyman, too, who had married them was merely making a short stay with the rector of the little village, and it was quite possible he might never see or hear of Dudley's arrest, or if he did never believe it was the same man he had that morning married to her; but the Scratches, and Dudley's mother, the world, the servant, in whose power she must ever be, and on whose fidelity she must ever rely, and lastly Sir Richard and Lady Allington?

How all these images stole clearly before Clarice's vision and heightened her dread of the future. She must return to her everyday life and face it all out—ay, that was the sting, while the vile secret of her life would be like a thorn festering in her soul, or a death's-head at life's banquet, turning all her young joys to sorrow.

"Heaven help me, for I love him!" sobbed Clarice, throwing herself down on a bank by the roadside, too weak and wearied to walk another step. "And I believed him honourable, noble, and good. Never, never to see him for years, and then all the time to be a felon's wife! I, who could have married so well—Sir Richard's heiress and adopted child. Yes, I must have

been indeed mad to have thrown myself thus away on the first stranger and adventurer I met."

Clarice had begun to calculate. It was the maiden's love and not the wife's that now spoke. There was no frenzied desire to hurry after her husband and cling again to him, and beseech them to let her share his pain, penalty and imprisonment. Her love was not the all-sacrificing passion of a Juliet—the incessant worship and devotion of a Leonora. Her whole nature revolted against Dudley Ivors. All the wily, flattering speeches with which he had wooed her took another colouring.

"A base and unscrupulous hypocrite!" she cried, passionately, writhing in anguish and lifting her cold white hands to her brow.

Her eyes at that moment fell on the narrow, hated circlet of gold—the bright, new wedding-ring. Fatal evidence of her ruin, accursed symbol of disgrace and despair. The sight of it hurt her too much to be borne. She drew it quickly off her finger and flung it desperately into the waters of a sullen stream but a few yards distant. It sank, rose again, and was borne by the current soon out of sight and beyond recall.

"It is like my lot," she muttered, in a dull, hoarse voice—"hidden and begrimed with loathsome slime and weeds, the weeds of falsehood, treachery and dishonour. Ah, Heaven, could I think this morning there was such a narrow line between Hades and Heaven?"

And she must go on bearing it, eat, drink and sleep just the same, dress herself, and go out and pay visits, and ride and drive as if nothing had happened. Clarice had no desire to confess the truth to Sir Richard, because why, if she were indeed his adopted daughter and heiress, should she spoil the chance of inheriting his splendid fortune?

Money would help her to endure everything so much better. Her blind folly would only distract the kind and indulgent protector of her childhood and youth.

"I could not bear him to think that I was wicked and deceitful," she murmured, rising from her still retreat and lifting her arms above her head.

How blue and smiling now was the sky. It had looked stormy enough when they had left the hotel a few hours previously. The sun seemed to shine out of mockery, she thought, as if it were a human light.

Men were tempted sorely at times, that she knew, and Dudley was rash and weak, easily led, and daringly unscrupulous. She was sorry for him, but she was sorrier for herself. She dared not look into the future. It was a good deal past luncheon time when Clarice returned to the hotel. Lady Rankin and her husband were out driving in Sir Richard's carriage; a young married lady had just called to leave cards on Zama, not knowing they were absent, and passed Clarice with a bow.

"If they only knew," she muttered, gliding quickly up the staircase to her little room.

There would be no more careless lounging in delicious idleness in the depths of easy-chairs, or rose-coloured dreaming, or novel reading. Clarice felt as if she must fret herself into her grave.

"Why, why!" she gasped, shuddering and flinging herself on her bed and drawing down the blinds, "are men so base? Why should the beautiful world be so hard and difficult to live in?"

She remembered the bitter sting of poverty which had driven its sharp fangs into her as a child. She thought of the Scratches, and knew they would be her enemies, and fatten and feed on this secret were it ever disclosed to them, or came to their ears.

"How they'd pay me out for snubbing them now that I am rich," sighed poor Clarice, pressing her aching head down lower on the soft feathers of her pillow, and wishing she could cry to relieve the pain about her brow.

The door opened and Mary entered noiselessly. She had not been aware that Clarice was here. There was to have been a long sweet day of "honey-mooning," so she had believed,

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and Clarice was to have returned many hours later.

"Are you ill, dear miss—I mean ma'am?" said Mary, pausing, and then running quickly to Clarice's side.

Clarice reached out her hand and held Mary's fast.

"I've had a blow, Mary—my death blow I could almost think."

Mary sank down by her young mistress's side, the ready tears coming fast. Clarice caught in her breath with a quick shivering sigh, and half turned her face to the wall. She must be clear and explicit at least with the girl who had been taken into her confidence—who had witnessed the marriage.

"I know I can trust you, Mary," she said, with a supreme effort at self-control. "You are a good girl and fond of me."

"That indeed, miss, I am and ever shall be. Aunt Steele knows how I love you. A kinder, sweeter young lady don't breathe."

"Well, then, Mary, be my friend always, for I'm in such sore trouble. I want you to be good to me. My husband—that man you saw I was married to this morning—has been arrested—Heaven help me—and taken—taken away to prison!"

"What?" cried Mary, starting backward, and then seizing Clarice's hand, carried it to her lips. "Never, miss, surely!"

She remembered seeing a half-starved, crazy-looking creature who had stolen a few sticks of wood, and had a loaf under one arm, dragged off from an angry crowd by the police, while a miserable-looking woman, with two little children clinging to her skirts, told the people in passionate accents that they were dying of hunger, that her husband was an honest man and a good worker till starvation bade him steal. Mary's ideas of a prison were thus associated with starvation—poverty and crime generally going hand in hand.

"Was he in want, miss?" she asked, recovering from the effects of her sympathetic effusion, and foreseeing a prosperous future for herself and family.

Mary was a good-hearted girl. She would never harm Clarice, but ladies similarly placed were always generous. Besides, the knowledge of other's misfortunes and misery is never quite displeasing to those who listen.

"I don't know," said Clarice, slowly pausing to choose her words, "anything of the horrid particulars; it might be a case of forgery; I rather think it was; but from this day, Mary, never mention his name to me; he will never claim me; he will be dead to me for ever!"

Mary saw that all things considered it would be better to be silent. Clarice clearly desired no long-winded perorations; the shock had been too severe to admit of any dwelling on it.

"Bring me a cup of strong tea," said Clarice, wearily, shuddering amid her pillows, her dainty jewelled fingers outstretched on the coverlet.

Beautiful Clarice feels no pleasure in her emotions now. Love is no longer that smiling, audacious Cupid that once perched himself gallantly on her shoulder and caressed her with every fascination of pathos and poetry. Love is something that hurts her cruelly—that is coiled like a deadly asp amid the lovely flowers of sentiment and feeling.

When her maid returned with the tea brewing in a dainty little Dresden teapot, a present to Clarice from Sir Richard, she perceived a telegram on the corner of the silver tray.

"That's for you, miss; it's just come. I hope it'll be nothink to worry you, I'm sure."

Clarice tore open the envelope with trembling eagerness. Was it from Dudley? Had she been summoned to him in London? Could Sir Richard know? Horrible thoughts of terror possessed her, and she was deadly pale as she read the contents.

They were nothing alarming. The telegram was from Sir Richard, telling her that he and Zama would arrive late that evening, and that Clarice was to engage another bedroom at the hotel, as a guest was coming with Sir Richard, his distant cousin, Sir Herbert Tresilian of

Crawley Castle, Leicestershire, and Eaton Place, London.

"Heir presumptive to Sir Richard's estates and property," muttered Clarice, who was wide awake enough generally speaking to her own interests till that audacious little god Cupid had bewildered her senses and carried her passions by storm.

Sir Richard had met Herbert Tresilian in London, and their old quarrel of many years standing had been mysteriously made up. Sir Richard was weaving a plan and plot of his own. He fancied Clarice was loverless and fancy free. Why should not Sir Herbert Tresilian, his heir presumptive, marry Clarice, his adopted daughter, and both mutually inherit the property?

The idea pleased Sir Richard. He dwelt upon it incessantly. Zama, too, admired and approved the notion, and liked Herbert Tresilian extremely. He was a tall, fair, and handsome man, not in the least, however, resembling Rupert, his younger brother, who was dark, with a pale, olive-tinted skin.

Sir Herbert was essentially a "cool card." Nothing flurried or agitated him. He had managed Sir Richard beautifully. With nothing fawning in his manner, cool, well-bred, and dégagé, the master of the Manor House believed he had sorely misjudged his cousin years ago.

"I suppose I must dress to receive them," said Clarice, roused to action. "My head feels like a heavy lump of lead, as if I should have brain fever."

"Then master and my lady will come to-night, miss?"

"Yes," said Clarice, still tearless and grave. "Go down to the manager of the hotel, Mary, and say Sir Richard desires a bedroom engaged at once for his cousin, Sir Herbert Tresilian."

As the girl obeyed, and Clarice found herself alone, a great wave of anguish rushed over her and carried all before it.

"Oh, my wretched husband, I did love you!" moaned Clarice, sinking on her knees by her bedside, her black, unbound hair about her neck and arms. "Poor dear, poor dear, you must be so wretched bound and in prison, shut out from the sweet light. I wonder what they are doing to you now?"

The tears came at last. Pity for the husband who could never claim her started them from the depths that were always easy to disturb, and pity for herself who had sinned past forgiveness, whose punishment must be heavy and life-long, brought on a heavy fit of weeping.

"After all I was but a child in his hands," she sobbed, rising from her knees. "Isn't it hard I should be made to pay so cruelly for my foolish trust?"

Dudley's pale, handsome face rose before her for an instant. She could almost hear the pleading in his voice again.

"Lost, lost!" sobbed Clarice, writhing in misery.

She knew well that there can never be any death and burial for our deeds—they are with us always. She sipped her tea while Mary brushed and then laid a handkerchief steeped in eau de cologne on her forehead. She sat in a kind of stupor in her bedroom, and sent word she was ill and tired to Lady Rankin, who repeatedly assailed her door.

Clarice wore a rich black satin dress to-night to receive Sir Richard, Lady Allington, and Sir Herbert Tresilian. It looked quiet and sad. Was not her life in ruins? Colours were for the light-hearted and free.

At nine o'clock a carriage and pair, the coachman and footman in the Allington livery, dashed up to the entrance of the hotel, and Clarice, leaning on Mary's arm, went slowly down the broad stone staircase to meet Sir Richard, Zama, and their guest.

Clarice was a very fair actress—she smiled as usual, and received Sir Richard's fatherly kiss and Zama's affectionate greetings with her customary manner. Sir Herbert Tresilian waited for an introduction, and as Sir Richard led him up to Clarice and greetings were interchanged, Clarice began to breathe freer; there was really

nothing very serious to dread if she were careful.

"And so sweet Clarice is pleased to have us back again with her?" said Sir Richard, later on in the drawing-room where tea and coffee were being served, addressing Major-General Rankin, who was standing on the balcony and smiling at Clarice.

"I should think I am," said Clarice, well on her guard; "it's been quite too absurdly slow alone."

"We worked very hard, Clarice, in London, said Zama, throwing a small parcel over to her. "I didn't forget you, child, there's the gold bracelet you took such a fancy one day to in Hunt and Roskell's."

"How kind of you to remember me," said Clarice, gratefully, and slipping the bracelet on her arm.

Sir Herbert stood silently by criticising her in his cold, measured way, through his eye-glass. So this was Clarice Heathcote, Sir Richard's adopted daughter, who would cut him out of his estates. He thinks her languid and slightly affected, she is the very opposite to his tastes, but what a good match for him, with every acre of Crawley Castle mortgaged to the hall-door, and latterly a suspicion of bailiffs in the air hovering like vultures about the noble old house in Eaton Place.

"Come upstairs, Clary, let's have a chat," whispered Zama, touching Clarice's arm; "you'll want, of course, to hear what the doctors think of dear Sir Richard's health."

Yes, Clarice had begun to be very anxious. She had been taught to consider him doomed to death for years past, he was invariably spoken of as one of those confirmed invalids to whom another winter must prove fatal.

"I see there's been an ugly scene with that fellow who was a good deal at the balls here," said Sir Richard, carelessly, just as they were leaving the room together.

"Ah! Ivors—Dudley Ivors, you mean," said Zama, indifferently. "He's been taken off to prison."

Clarice had turned so ashen pale that Sir Herbert, who perceived everything and had his game also to play, scrutinised her intently. Women don't blush and turn pale for nothing, he knew, especially women of Clarice's temperament.

"Yes, it's all in the 'Echo' which I bought at the station before leaving London," said Sir Richard, without regarding Clarice. "Fearful row; met him with his sister. Case of forgery and cheating at cards combined."

Zama looked at Clarice; she had gripped a chair and her lips were quivering.

"Read it, Clarice," said Sir Richard, throwing the paper over to her, "and let it be a warning to all young girls to be careful whom they fraternise with at these watering-places. The fellow was on the look-out for a rich wife, and nearly hooked Sir John Darlington's only child here last autumn."

Clarice took the paper, but the words swam before her. Sir Herbert still studied her intently.

"I can't read it," muttered Clarice, struggling against weakness.

"By Jove, she must have loved the man, I do believe," was his thought.

Clarice rallied her courage and steadied her nerves with a desperate effort.

"The poor fellow danced beautifully," she said, now acting cautiously and shrugging her shoulders. "And that's all I know about him."

"I'm sure the way he fed you with ices, creams, and tipsy-cake at the ball was enough to make you bilious for a month," said Zama, lightly.

She pitied Clarice; she feared that she had begun to love Dudley Ivors too well for her peace and had assumed indifference to hide a breaking heart.

"Ah, well, he's gone to that better land where there are no ices or dances or pretty girls to flirt with," said Sir Herbert, in a cool aside, "and there let him stay, say I."

Clarice followed Zama into her bedroom, and there her strength failed her.

"Poor child, I'm afraid you loved him," said Zama, moving back a lock of Clarice's hair.

There was no answer, only a wild, despairing cry, a sudden drooping of black curled lashes and Clarice fell to the ground in a swoon.

CHAPTER XVI.

"SIR HERBERT WILL MAKE YOU A GOOD HUSBAND."

I fly like a bird of the air
In search of a home and a rest,
A balm for the sickness of care,
A bliss for a bosom unblest.

Both Sir Herbert and Clarice were in time enlightened regarding Sir Richard's wishes. Clarice listened in silence; she knew she would lose a splendid position and the bulk of the wealth she had been taught to consider would be hers, were she to confess the terrible weakness and folly of her past conduct to own that she was the wife of a felon.

A sentence of ten years' penal servitude had been passed upon Dudley Ivors, and ten years, reflected Clarice, was a long time to look forward to; those ten years would be the very best of her life.

"And after all, no one knows but Mary, and I can always make it worth her while to be silent," thought Clarice, little dreaming that the Scratchells and Mrs. Ivors, Dudley's mother, were in the secret. The Adventurer told them just exactly sufficient to make them able to threaten Clarice with exposure when any suitable moment came, and victimize her at their pleasure; he enjoined his mother to save up neat sums for him out of the spoil as he called it, against his return to the world, for he was not exactly so sublime and heroic a character as to vanish entirely from the scene and suffer in silence, and his marriage with Clarice had been a clear calculation; he had followed up every move with consummate skill; it was one of those rare chances in life that occasionally came to such men, when all hangs on the turning of a die, on the wilfulness of a woman's caprice or passion.

After Clarice's swoon Zama avoided all allusion to Dudley Ivors. She even hinted to Sir Richard that the girl may have been fascinated by the glitter of his gay, careless life; but he disregarded all such hints. His mind was made up. He would leave his fortune to Sir Herbert Tresilian and Clarice, provided they married; if not, he would provide for both; but the main portion of his wealth would go to endow a hospital.

Clarice was sitting with him as usual this morning in the library reading. Sir Herbert was out riding, and Sir Richard thought the present a good opportunity to approach the subject so close to his heart. He had always found Clarice so sweet and docile that he never anticipated opposition to his wishes. She seemed one of those charming feminine creatures who are easily guided and led by those who know best what is good for them.

"How do you like Sir Herbert, my dear?" he asked, throwing down his book and looking straight at Clarice.

Clarice knew his eyes were fixed upon her, and was well on guard.

"Oh! pretty well, Sir Richard," she answered, carelessly.

"He is not obnoxious to you. I suppose you have never seen anyone else you would prefer to marry, have you?"

Clarice's heart fluttered in her breast; a pain-fraught dread was on her. This cross-examination was very terrible.

"No, decidedly no one I should prefer to marry," she said, in a cool measured voice.

"I thought not; what opportunities have you had for seeing lovers?"

"Not many," faltered Clarice, turning pale. It was harder to act a part than she could have believed.

"It would make me happy, Clarice, if you could care for Herbert Tresilian," went on Sir Richard, believing his word would be law; "he is my heir presumptive. You are my adopted daughter; it would be hardly fair to leave you all my wealth and none to him, or all to him and none to you; a marriage between you then would settle everything to my satisfaction."

Clarice was silent; she thought it wiser to listen and be betrayed into no unguarded speech.

"But if—if Sir Herbert cares for some one else better than me," muttered Clarice, knowing she was expected to speak.

"My dear child, do you think I would risk your future happiness without being certain of the character, habits and tastes of the man whom you will marry? Ah, no, my Clarice, you misjudge me utterly. Sir Herbert is a man of honour; already he loves you; he has confessed as much to me during these few weeks he has been with us. Sir Herbert will make you a good husband."

Husband! The word sent the colour in a furious tide over Clarice's neck and brow. Sir Richard thought this blushing very pretty and modest.

"You—you are quite sure that he loves me?" faltered Clarice, nervously, twisting her diamond rings.

"He only waits to ask you to be his wife. I must confess, Clarice, that I should like to see you both married and settled before I die. I believe you are quite fresh and unspoilt by the world. Sir Herbert is the very man to guard and protect my innocent flower."

Clarice rose, unable to bear these loving words; her remorse and sorrow were too keen. She burst into a passion of tears. Through her strong sympathies, weakness and emotion had Dudley Ivors led her senses captive. Her misplaced confidence had been bitterly outraged.

"I am pleased to find you have a heart, Clarice," said Sir Richard, rising and bending over her; "that it grieves you a little to think you will soon lose your adopted father and leave the Manor House. In a husband's home we've been happy together, have we not? You have come to me and comforted me in place of my lost Lillian."

His voice fell away to a whisper at this mention of his daughter's name.

(To be Continued.)

IN EVERY SEA.

IN every sea there somewhere lies an unknown isle,
Delicious with the sweetness of its air, and clad
In dewy umbrage; fruited deep each dusk defile,
And fairy rings make all the fragrant meadow glad.

And so there is no bark upon life's tide
I ween,
That, in the beckoning sometime, may
not anchor find,
Flowered shores and leaning groves of palm between,
While silvery fountains murmur on the wind. P. P.

SCIENCE.

MILK AND BUTTER PRESERVATIVES.

A HIGH German authority in dainty matters, Dr. De Kleuze, of Munich, says that the preserving compounds so widely advertised are nearly always composed of varying proportions of bicarbonate of soda, sometimes mixed with common salt, boracic acid, borax, mixtures of borax with common salt, salicylic acid, and of late a mixture containing half of boracic acid

and half of sulphate of potassium. Bicarbonate of soda has been in use a long time, and is still largely used. It acts by neutralising the lactic acid which is formed in the milk, but its action is not satisfactory, as it is liable to give the milk a soapy taste. Salicylic acid is also unsatisfactory as well as expensive. Boracic acid is a powerful antiseptic, and preferable to borax. For dairy use Dr. De Kleuze finds the above-mentioned mixture of boracic acid and sulphate of potassium superior to all other preservatives, and perfectly harmless as well as cheap. It can be obtained of any druggist. Sixty grains to a gallon of milk or a pound of butter are sufficient to prevent souring or rancidity.

THE HUMAN MANUFACTORY.

A MAN may eat and drink heartily all day, says an unknown writer, and sit and lounge about, doing nothing, in one sense of the word; but his body must keep hard at work all the time, or it will die. Suppose the stomach refused to work within ten minutes after a hearty dinner, the man would die in convulsions in a few hours; or cholera or cramp—colic would rack and wreck him. Supposing the pores of the skin—meaning thereby the glandular apparatus with which they are connected—should go on a "strike," he would in an hour be burning up with fever; oppression would weigh upon the system, and soon become insupportable.

Suppose the liver became mulish, the appetite would be annihilated, food would be loathed, torturing pains would invade the sinews of the back, and the head would ache to bursting. Suppose the kidneys shut up shop, then danger most imminent, sufferings unbearable, and death more certain, would be the speedy and unenviable result. If the little workshops of the eye should close, in an hour he could not shut nor open them without physical force, and in another hour he would be blind; or if those of the tongue should close, it would become dry as a bone and stiff as steel. To keep such a complication of machinery in working order for a lifetime is a miracle of wisdom; but to work them by the pleasures of eating and drinking is a miracle of beneficence.

USES OF THE POTATO.

In France farina is largely used for culinary purposes. The famed gravies, sauces, and soups of France are largely indebted for their excellence to that source, and its bread and pastry equally so, while a great deal of the so-called cognac, imported into England from France, is the product of the potato. Throughout Germany the same uses are common. In Poland the manufacture of spirits from the potato is a most extensive trade. "Settin brandy," well known in commerce, is largely imported into England, and is sent from thence to many of her foreign possessions as the produce of the grape, and is placed on many a table of England as the same, while the fair ladies of our country perfume themselves with the spirit of potato under the designation Eau de Cologne.

But there are other uses which this esculent is turned to abroad. After extracting the farina the pulp is manufactured into ornamental articles, such as picture frames, snuff boxes, and several descriptions of tops, and the water that runs from it in the process of manufacture is a most valuable scourer. For perfect cleansing woollens and such like articles, it is the housewife's panacea, and if the washerwoman happens to have chilblains she becomes cured by the operation.

PASTEBOARD shutters, in imitation of wood, are the latest.

MR. JOHN S. CLARKE will have possession of the Haymarket Theatre this year for four months from August 1. He will commence this season there with a new play written by Mr. Dion Boucicault.

July 17, 1880.

THE LONDON READER.



[GATHERING CLOUDS.]

HER HUSBAND'S SECRET.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Frank Bertram's Wife," "Strong Temptation," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XV.

A TINY CLOUD.

A little fire is quickly trodden out,
Which being suffered rivers cannot quench.

SHAKESPEARE.

HUGH, EARL OF FAIRLEIGH, entered the conservatory and saw his wife at Sir Reginald's side. His first impression was satisfaction. He knew the Desmonds had been fond of Rosamond once; he believed they had dropped her upon her loss of fortune; it pleased him, therefore, that this baronet brother of the haughty marchioness should see his wife as she now was—a wealthy peeress, and one of the most courted women in London.

He idolised his fair girl-wife, and he triumphed in her old friend's discomfiture. He never thought of attributing Sir Reginald's evident embarrassment to anything but surprise. He pressed him to visit them; gave him an invitation to Rosamond's next "at home," and inquired with the utmost politeness whether Lady Desmond was in town.

The countess listened as in a dream, standing between these two men, one of whom was her husband, the other her first love. She knew quite well that Reginald loved her still; she felt dimly that having lost her had but increased his love; her every instinct revolted against receiving him in her husband's house.

Never by word or smile did she echo the earl's

invitation. She stood there—one hand on his arm, the other toying idly with her bouquet. She never looked at Rex, never raised her clear eyes to his face, and he who in his whole life had studied no one's wishes but his own, caught at Lord Fairleigh's invitation and accepted it eagerly.

"You are an old friend of my wife's," said the earl, with a fond, proud smile at Rosamond; "you must let us see a great deal of you."

"I thought you did not like Sir Reginald," said Lady Fairleigh to her husband, when they drove home that evening.

"I used not to; but he has improved wonderfully of late—quite steadied down."

"Hugh," she said to him, changing the subject, "I had such an adventure while I was out this afternoon."

Lord Fairleigh had not accompanied his wife on her drive.

"An adventure, Rose. I hope it was not an unpleasant one."

"No, but it was strange. When I was in the park I thought I should like to walk through Kensington Gardens—I used to go there very often, you know, when I lived with Mrs. Ashley when I was a girl."

"I should like to know what you consider yourself now."

"A quiet married woman of twenty-two," demurely.

"Well, go on, dear. Let me hear about this adventure of yours."

"I had left the carriage and was sitting on a bench in Kensington Gardens when a lady and a little boy came up and sat down too. They were nice people—mother and child, I fancy—but the moment the boy saw me he ran up to me and said I was the pretty lady his papa showed him a long while ago."

"He must have mistaken you for someone else, Rosamond."

"I suppose so. The lady apologised and said he had taken a great fancy to a photograph, and always called it his 'pretty lady.' Poor little fellow, he looked so disappointed when I

told him he had made a mistake, for I did not know his papa."

"What did he say?"

"That perhaps papa knew me. Nothing would convince him. He was such a pretty little boy, Hugh. Seven years old, I should think."

"What a child-fancier you are, Rose?"

"I did so wish I had asked him where he lived, he was such a darling child. I could have sent him one of my photographs. Don't laugh, Hugh."

"I can't help it, Rosamond. You who have the flattery of half London yet seem to find more charm in a child's calling you 'pretty lady.'"

He did not speak again until they reached home; he leaned back in his corner of the carriage so that she might not see the emotion on his face; he knew as well as if he had been at her side that her childish admirer was his own son—his lawful heir.

"I must go to Spartan Street to-morrow and tell Mrs. Clive I don't like Bertie to go into the parks or anywhere where he is likely to meet people; and yet I can't do that. What would she think? I suppose things must take their course."

"I sometimes think," he mused, wearily, "I have made a great mistake. My wife is so good and noble I might have told her all. She would have pitied me and been tender with the boy. Ah, well, it is too late now."

The days passed on. Sir Reginald Dane became a frequent visitor at Lord Fairleigh's house. He seemed to have laid himself out to gain the earl's friendship. Hugh, by nature reserved, was a little surprised by the manner of his new acquaintance, but he put it down to anxiety to make amends for the slight once dealt out to his wife, and he responded to the baronet's advances until these two were close companions. They might often have been seen sitting together in the club or walking arm in arm down the Mall.

Rosamond hated this companionship. Her

love for Reginald was a thing of the past, but she worshipped Hugh with her whole heart. She never could bear to see him by the baronet's side; she had a keen, subtle instinct harm would come of their intimacy.

She herself avoided Sir Reginald as much as a woman can without acknowledged cause avoid a man who moves in the same set with herself, and is her husband's friend. For some time she was successful in avoiding a tete-a-tete, but at last there came an unlucky evening when Hugh had promised to take her to hear some favourite singer, and for the first time in his life failed to fulfil his pledge to her.

Rosamond always looked back to that day as an epoch in her life. It was in July, and they were sitting over a late breakfast when a telegram was brought in for the earl. He read it through hurriedly, crushed it in his hand, and turned to his wife.

"Rosamond, I am obliged to go down to the Manor Court to-day. I hope I shall be back in time for the opera."

"Must you go to-day, Hugh?" a little pettishly.

Remember, he had thoroughly spoilt her, or done his best to. In all their wedded life he had never crossed her will.

"I'm afraid I must."

"You know we were to lunch at Lady Carsdale's, and you were going to drive me to Richmond."

"You must make my apologies to Lady Carsdale, and Richmond will have to wait for another day."

Rosamond pouted.

"How dreadfully dull I shall be."

"Nonsense, dear. You've heaps of things to amuse you. Go and have a farewell peep at the Academy, or there's a concert on at St. James's Hall, I think."

Lady Fairleigh shook her head.

"Take me with you, Hugh. I shouldn't interfere with your business a bit. I've never seen the Court. I could go rambling all about while you saw the steward. I suppose that's what you're going for—oh, yes, Hugh, you must take me."

"I can't, dear," with a little sigh, whose weariness she did not notice.

His one hope was that years might pass before he took his wife to the Court. The idea of his letting her ramble about there alone with its present inmates was impossible.

"Hugh," looking at him with her clear eyes, "why don't you want to take me?"

"I do want to take you some day, dear, only it must be when all is arranged to receive you properly, as becomes the Countess of Fairleigh. I can't have my wife creeping in unexpectedly like a little ghost."

"Do you know, Hugh, I have thought once or twice you really wanted to keep me away from Fairleigh."

"Nonsense, child, you shouldn't get such thoughts into your head."

"I don't get them, they come."

"What brings them, wife?"

Rosamond raised her clear eyes to his face and put one hand in his.

"When I was ill abroad, Hugh, don't you remember I asked you to take me home to Fairleigh?"

"Yes, dear, but it is a little country village, and I could not trust my wife where there is no good medical advice."

"And once or twice this summer, Hugh, I've asked you to take me down for the day, and you've always refused."

"You are not fit for so much fatigue."

"When I dance half the night, Hugh. You are inconsistent."

"Am I? I will own to being over anxious where my wife is concerned."

"And you won't take me to-day, Hugh?"

"I can't, dear."

"Well, you'll come back early. I wouldn't miss Patti for anything, and it's her last night this season. You'll make the steward get his business over soon and come back to dinner."

"You'd better not wait for dinner, Rose. I'll

be home at half-past seven, in time to take you to the opera."

"And next time you go you are to take me with you, don't forget that, Hugh."

She stood at the window to see him get into his cab and drive away. The earl carried with him the picture of the girl countess, in her white morning dress and blue ribbons, waving her hand to him with a loving smile.

That morning was nearly the last of their halcyon days. From then a tiny cloud seemed to spring up between them, almost imperceptible at first, but growing larger day by day, until at last it bid fair to blight their lives.

Poor Hugh! he needed no trouble in his home, he had enough on other sides. The telegram had been hurrying him down to Fairleigh had come from the faithful housekeeper, Martha Ward, to the Earl of Fairleigh—

"L. F. very ill. Please come at once."

He had never been to the Court since his marriage; he had never looked on the beautiful features of Bianca Vane since he had given her title to another; he knew that the poor young creature was well cared for, Susan Green and her sister were devoted attendants, and the old village doctor, who had attended three generations of the family, had been let into the secret of the Laurel Walk and added his care to theirs.

As the train bore him swiftly onwards Hugh, Earl of Fairleigh, had but one wish and hope, selfish, cruel, and wicked though it seemed, it yet was natural—he hoped he might find Bianca gone to her rest.

The carriage had been sent to meet him; the footman and coachman with it both looked pleased to see their master, and asked respectfully after the mistress they had never seen. Hugh felt a little pang. Rosamond was right; he had tried to keep her from the Court at all risks. He saw in his steward's face those he had expected to see her with him now and were disappointed.

Lord Fairleigh went to the blue parlour and held a private consultation with Mrs. Ward: the good woman greeted him with mingled congratulations on his wedding and lamentations over the death of the little heir. Hugh put his hand to his head wearily.

"Thanks, Martha," he said, kindly, but as though he wished to change the subject. "Now tell me everything—how is the countess?"

He shuddered a little as he spoke, he was so used to apply the title to Rosamond.

"She has taken a turn for the better, my lord. Dr. Gray hopes he can pull her round again."

"And does anyone suspect about it?"

"Oh, dear no," returned Mrs. Ward, with great complacency. "I've been wearing my arm in a sling the last ten days, and the servants think Dr. Gray comes to see that. I fancy they think I make a great fuss about it," with a broad smile.

"And you are sure they suspect nothing?"

"Positive, my lord. Once or twice when Lady Fairleigh has been taking a walk in the grounds one or two have fancied they saw someone, but the others all laughed and said it must be the ghost, for there was no one else to see."

"Has Gray been to-day?"

"We expect him every moment, my lord."

"And what has been the matter?"

"She was very violent last week, my lord; for days together she wasn't calm half-an-hour; she almost wore herself out. The doctor says nothing but sleep can save her; he's tried almost all sorts of opium."

"I had better see her," rising, with marked and visible reluctance. "I must go back by the afternoon train."

Mrs. Ward led the way: both were perfectly familiar with it. Hugh sighed as he opened the last door and stood in the secret rooms. Mrs. Ward did not accompany him further; she was devoted to her master, but she never stayed in those rooms if she could help it—they gave her such an uncanny feeling.

Passing by Susan Green with a kindly nod, Lord Fairleigh pushed aside the curtain and entered the inner room. There, pacing up and down like some wild beast caged in a narrow

den, her swart hair falling on her shoulders, her eyes burning with excitement, her cheeks hollow from want of rest, walked Bianca, Lady Fairleigh.

She stopped in the middle of her impatient tramp and saw the earl. With a wild, eager cry of recognition, she rushed to him, flung her two arms round his neck and clung to him as one who had found her refuge.

"Hugh, you were always good to me, send Susan Green away, I'm so tired, I want to go to sleep and she won't let me."

"You are mistaken, Bianca," speaking gently as though to a sick child, and trying vainly to loose the arms that clung about him. "Susan Green wants you to go to sleep—we all want it."

"But she watches me so; I think, do you know, she's going a little wrong here," and the countess tapped her own forehead suggestively.

"Perhaps she is, I never thought of that," confessed Hugh, in a soothing tone.

"I am sure of it."

"And how do you like the Count, Bianca?"

"It's very small."

"Is it?" thinking of its noble proportions.

"Yes; but there's a grand house near—I got away from Susan one day and ran on and on till I came to it; it was so large and full of lovely things, but Susan caught me and brought me back."

Lord Fairleigh looked questioningly at Susan, who was quick to read his glance.

"Sir," she said, nervously, "that is, my lord, she did that cunning there's no being even with her. One day she got away and ran into the drawing-room."

"It might have been worse—if no one knew her that."

"No one saw her, but she did a sight of mischief; you know that picture of the mistress, my lord, that you sent home to hang in the drawing-room?"

"Yes, I wished all the household to see and know their mistress."

"Ah! and a sweet face it is too, my lord: well, the picture was not hung up then but resting on one of the sofas waiting till someone came over from the town to do it. We found her," pointing to Bianca, "standing before the picture with the tongs in her hand, she struck it once and took the gilt off the frame, and she was just ready to send the tongs right across my lady's face when I caught her."

Hugh was not a superstitious man, but yet his blood crept as he listened; even if Rosamond's picture had been utterly spoilt Bianca would have been powerless to harm the original, nevertheless he shivered. Bianca caught up the last words.

"I hate her!" she hissed. "She has an English face, and you told me long ago you preferred English women. You love her, and when you stay away from me you go to her."

Her eyes burned like fire, there was a larger red spot on each of her cheeks.

"Bianca," said Hugh, imploredly, "be calm, don't excite yourself, I am with you."

"Will you stay?"

"A little while."

"You will sit down close beside me and let me go to sleep?"

He sat down on a low chair by the sofa. Bianca took his hand and clasped it so tightly that it caused him positive pain.

"Good-night, I'm going to sleep. Susan Green, if you like to run away I'd quite forgive you."

Ten minutes afterwards she was in a healthy natural sleep.

"What am I to do?" asked Lord Fairleigh of the doctor, when he made his appearance. "I must go back to town."

"It will be death to my patient if you do. You have done more for her than any medicine already; stay and complete your cure."

"My wife will be waiting for me, doctor; I have promised to take her to the opera."

"She's not the lady I should fancy from her picture, if she'd grudge giving up the opera for a poor sick creature like this."

"She knows nothing of Bianca."

"I suppose you know your own business best, my lord. I think it unwise—"

"Tell me your opinion of your patient."

"I think she will weather this attack; without sleep she must have encumbered; sleep is saving her."

"And you mean I must not leave her to return home?"

"To-night, when she has had several hours of refreshing sleep, you can go, but to leave now would be simple brutality! Her hand holds yours; if you were to break that embrace we should have one of her worst paroxysms."

Lord Fairleigh thought a little.

"I suppose I must stay. I can go up by the last train. I must telegraph to Rosamond, of course."

But before he did so he ran through the list of their acquaintance to see if there was no one to whom he could delegate the care of escorting his wife. Suddenly he thought of Sir Reginald Dane.

"Of course, he'd take her; he's the best-natured fellow I know; stands all Rosamond's snubbing like a martyr. Besides, they were brother and sister, of course, when she lived with the Desmonds. Yes, that'll do."

He dictated a message to his friend saying he was detained by unavoidable business, and begging him if disengaged to escort Lady Fairleigh to the opera. The doctor undertook to convey it to the telegraph office, and then he went away, leaving Hugh to the task of helping to detain the poor troubled spirit who was such a drop of bitterness in his cup of happiness.

Often in the dark aftertime that followed he wished he had acted on his own impulse, and hurried home to keep his promise to Rosamond. Nothing but humanity kept him where he was.

CHAPTER XVI.

POISON SOWED.

For love is strong as death,
And jealousy is as cruel as the grave.

THAT day seemed unusually long to Rosamond Lady Fairleigh. Like many other ladies of fashion she was in the habit of planning out her days, and if anything happened to interfere with her arrangements, she was not quick at redistributing her time.

She wrote her husband's excuses and her own to Lady Carsdale; she told the footman she should not require her carriage till the evening, and then she spent the day quietly at home, wondering what strange objection her husband could have to taking her to his old ancestral home.

Punctually at half-past seven she came down to the drawing-room dressed for the opera. She had spent longer than usual over her toilette, and she looked a creature fit to take hearts by storm.

An evening dress of the palest blue, trimmed with wild roses; the same flowers in her brown hair; one single row of pearls round her throat; a soft white fur cloak ready to throw on. She had been waiting about five minutes when the door opened and the footman announced Sir Reginald Dane.

"You are surprised to see me," said Rex, coming forward with effusion. "I have just received a telegram from the earl; he is unexpectedly detained, and has done me the honour to allow me to escort you to the opera in his stead."

He gave her the telegram to read, for he knew she would doubt him. Rosamond understood at once that rather than disappoint her her husband had provided another escort. She could not refuse to accompany Sir Reginald, because to do so would involve endless explanations.

"I wish Hugh had not troubled you," she exclaimed, quickly. "I could very well have stayed at home."

"I am only too pleased to escort you."

He took up her opera cloak and wrapped her

in it. He found her fan and gloves. She shivered a little as she took his offered arm.

"Do not shrink from me like that," he cried, passionately. "Lady Fairleigh, do not treat me like the dirt beneath your feet."

"I did not mean to," answered Rosamond, firmly; "only I wish you would understand me. I do not think you and I can ever be friends."

"I mean to make the attempt."

He led her downstairs, placed her in the carriage, stepped in after her, and they were fairly off. All through the drive he never said a word that could offend or startle her. He acted his part to perfection; he was simply her husband's friend.

"Fairleigh Court is a lovely estate," he said, at last. "I suppose you will be going down to it soon now; the season is waning."

"I am not sure."

"Fairleigh used to be devoted to the Court, and it really is a beautiful place."

"I have never seen it."

"Have you not?" in great surprise. "Then you have a treat in store. The grounds are the show of the place. Whenever we had visitors at Allerton in older times my mother, who was intimate with the reigning countess, used to take them over to Fairleigh to see the winter garden."

"What is that?"

"A garden about a mile in extent completely covered with grass. There is a promenade down the centre, with seats on either side, and there are fountains and singing birds in their cages. I assure you, the winter garden is one of the lions of Fairleigh."

"You make me wish to go there more than ever."

"I hope when you are at Fairleigh I may have the pleasure of welcoming you and the Earl to Allerton."

It was strange to hear him speak of his home. In their last conversation he had asked her to be its mistress, now he invited her husband as a guest within its walls.

"Allerton joins the Court, does it not?"

"Not precisely, but it is near it. I have been very little at Allerton lately."

"And Hugh has been very little at Fairleigh. I think this is his first visit since I knew him."

"I am surprised to hear that. When no steward is kept there is generally so much for the master's eye."

"But Hugh has a steward. He went down to see him to-day."

Rex shook his head.

"Indeed, I think you are mistaken, Lady Fairleigh. There never has been a steward on the estate. Every tenant prides himself in dealing with the earl direct."

"But there must be a steward," said Rosamond, a little pettishly. "Or Hugh would not have to go and see him."

Sir Reginald yielded the point gracefully. He had suggested the doubt of her husband's truth. He would leave the poison to work its own way into her brain.

"There is one thing you boast," he said, laughing, "which we have not—a real, visible ghost."

"Nonsense!"

"Sober truth. There is a lady who keeps the affairs of the Vans under her special protection. She reappeared last month, after an absence of a hundred years."

"And what did she do?" incredulously.

"Walked about, I believe."

"Rubbish. I beg your pardon, Sir Reginald, but I quite decline to believe such a thing."

"And yet you used to be superstitious."

She froze at that as she always froze at any reference to the past, and indeed no reply was needed, for she had arrived at the Opera House. Five minutes more, and Rosamond was in her box, listening to the familiar strains of Il Barbiere.

Many eyes were turned on them, for they were a handsome couple, and a few strangers, quite out of Belgravia's circles, declared they were lovers. Reginald felt almost beside him-

self. Here alone with Rosamond he could forget those years of separation.

If only he kept silent he might go back in fancy to the time when she was his and his alone. He proved himself a very agreeable companion; even Rosamond, although she never felt quite at ease with him, confessed that he was as amusing and fascinating as ever.

"The earl lost a treat," he said, simply, as they were waiting for the carriage. "I never heard Patti in better voice."

"Nor I. I have enjoyed it very much."

"Have you?" in a dangerously low and tender voice. "I am so glad."

Rosamond saw her mistake.

"Lady Fairleigh, will you pass a sponge over our first acquaintance and begin a new one, in which you will forgive and forget the past, and think of me as your husband's friend?"

"Yes," says Rosamond, softly, "I will."

"I daresay we shall find the earl at home. It is not such a very long journey from Fairleigh, and he could not attend to business after six, I should say."

"Sir Reginald, how is Lady Desmond?"

"She is very well. She and Alick are not in town this season. I wrote to tell her of my meeting with you, and—everything," finishing rather lamely.

"Yes," repeated Rosamond, "everything?"

"And she commissioned me to give you her love if ever I should be privileged enough to be allowed to."

"I always loved Georgie."

"And she loved you."

"I often think she and the marquis are the most perfectly happy couple I ever met."

"Yes," quietly, "and their favourite home is the Towers. The poor people worship my sister."

It occurred to young Lady Fairleigh that it was very hard her husband did not make his favourite home at her country seat, and give the poor people there a chance of worshipping her. This was just what Rex had meant to happen.

They had reached her husband's mansion now. Sir Reginald held her hand a minute longer than he need have done, but he made no attempt to follow her in. He stood on the steps while she entered; then raised his hat and disappeared.

"Has the earl returned, Hawkins?"

Hawkins was the hall porter.

"Not yet, my lady."

A strange sense of ill attacked Rosamond. It was not far short of twelve o'clock. What could be detained Hugh? She went upstairs to her dressing-room, threw off her wraps, and then went back to the drawing-room. Come what might, she had resolved not to go to bed until her husband returned.

She was very, very tired; the day had been a wearisome one to her; the long tete-a-tete with Sir Reginald had tried her, and now this uneasiness about her husband seemed more than she could bear. She stretched herself on the sofa, laid her handkerchief saturated with eau de cologne upon her aching brow, and waited with as much patience as she could muster for the well-known step.

Her heart seemed sick with longing. There was a feverish eagerness about her which made her start at the slightest sound. It seemed to the young countess that all the neighbourhood must be abroad and returning at this time. The cabs that passed, the flies, the pedestrians were past her calculations. Each moment her hopes were raised only to be destroyed.

At last, when the clocks had chimed one, she heard the longed-for sound, the firm, erect step; then his voice speaking to the porter. A minute more and he was with his wife.

"You should not have sat up, darling," kissing her. "Well, did you go to the opera?"

"Yes, and it was so good. Hugh, you look tired."

"Remember the hour, little lady. I must expect to look tired coming off a journey at this time."

"What have you been doing all day, Hugh?"

"Business, dear. The estate has got into great disorder through my cousin's long absence and my recent one."

"Did you tell them all how I wanted to come?"

"I told the housekeeper. She is very anxious to see her new mistress."

"And when will you take me, Hugh?"

"I don't know, dear."

"Shall you have to go down on business again soon, Hugh?"

"I'm afraid so."

"It would be much better if we gave up the idea of going down to Aston this autumn, and went to the Court instead."

"I don't think so."

"You must be very dull, Hugh, when you go there all alone. Don't you miss me very much? Now if I were there it wouldn't matter how much business cropped up, for you would have me there just the same."

The earl took his wife in his arms and kissed her fondly.

"So that I have you, Rosamond, I care but little what else happens."

"Don't despond, dear. No trouble can touch us while we are together. We have only each other to cling to now," thinking sadly of the little child Heaven had lent to her for so short a time.

"Only ourselves!" echoed her husband.

"Rosamond, do you mean to sit up all night?"

He took out his handkerchief, and in so doing dropped a knot of rose-coloured ribbon; he passed on upstairs, and his wife, stooping, picked up the trifle. It had probably formed the trimming of some woman's dress.

Lady Fairleigh started. Her husband had been away on business. He had probably spent the whole day closetted with his steward. Where did he become possessed of the pink ribbons? She was sure they were not hers. Rosamond was not a suspicious nature, but poison had been dropped into her ears that night. She made a great mistake: she dropped the fatal bow into her pocket and said nothing about it to her husband.

(To be Continued.)

FRENCH WIT.

In the absence of the head of the household the nurse furnishes the census-taker with the information he desires.

"My master," she says, "is an idiot."

"Completely?"

"Completely. Not of the violent kind, but harmless. His wife is eighty-two years old. Only one child, a son, aged thirty-five. No, he can neither read nor write."

"Thank you, mademoiselle."

"Do not mention it, sir."

"Catherine," says the butler, when the official has departed, "where do you expect to go to when you die? You know master belongs to the Academy, and missus is only thirty, and their boy is at the infant school."

"I know it, but I'll teach them to sack a lady for having a few habitual discrepancies in the marketing account. Avenged! Ha! ha!"

HOW TO CURE A TOOTHACHE.

SOME months ago an English tourist lingering in a country churchyard was present at a funeral, and observed among the group of mourners a young man, who particularly attracted attention by his swollen face and the utter dejection of his appearance.

"Here at least is one true mourner," thought the Englishman.

While this thought was passing through his mind the supposed mourner took up a skull which lay on the top of a heap of dry mould and crumbled bones. He raised it to his lips, and

with his own teeth, extracted a tooth from it. Horror filled the stranger as he watched this proceeding, and saw him throw the skull carelessly away, while he wrapped the tooth in paper and put it in his pocket.

"Can you tell me why he did that?" asked our tourist of an old man who had stood beside him during the funeral ceremony.

"Ay, surely, your honour; the poor boy was very bad wi' the toothache, an' it's allowed to be a cure if you draw a tooth fræ a skull wi' your ain teeth. He'll sew the tooth in his clothes an' wear it as long as he lives."

"You don't tell me so! Do you think the remedy will be effectual?"

"It's like enough, sir," replied the old man, showing where a tooth was sewed in the lining of his own waistcoat. "It's five years since I pulled that in the same way, an' I never had a touch o' the toothache since."

MARRIED, YET NO WIFE.

AN extraordinary tale of religious hardship comes from the canton of Lucerne. Thirty years ago a popular Roman Catholic priest in one of the parishes of that canton, after finishing a sermon on a certain day, laid aside his stole, and said to his people with strong feeling that he should never stand in that place again, since he intended to cast off the yoke of celibacy and marry a wife, and this would involve the resignation of his office. Although he would gladly remain a Catholic, it would be necessary for him to become a Protestant if he took a wife. He married accordingly, and was received into the Protestant Church, and from that day until very recently continued to live with his wife in the same parish.

A few weeks ago the wife died. During her illness a Catholic priest was admitted to her bedside, and succeeded, the story runs, in restoring her to the fold of the Church of Rome. Her friends prevailed upon the husband to permit her to be buried as a Roman Catholic, and both he and his only child, a young man, followed the remains to the grave. Great was their grief when they saw upon the register, which in Swiss parishes is exposed in public places, that her name had been entered as that of an unmarried woman. When the widower complained, he was told by the priest who received her recantation, that she had confessed to him that in all her married life she had looked upon her marriage as unlawful.

FACETIAE.

ARGUMENTUM AD HOMINEM.

CUSTOMER: "But I thought moustachios were going out?"

HAIRDRESSER: "Oh, no, sir, they're the 'ite of fashion. I wear one myself!"

—Funny Folks.

BRITISHER: "Well, Sam, what did you think of the waxwork?"

YANKEE FRIEND: "Wall—I guess they're uncommon like an or'inary English party!"

—Punch.

THE TAX COLLECTOR.

TAX instinctive and natural way in which the tax collector knocks at people's doors has led some profound thinkers to believe that he must have been born with a call.

Some people cannot help perspiring when they hear the tax-collector at the door. But this is principally when he calls for the poor rate.

People in this delightful land are never completely exempted from taxes until their houses have been completely exempted of furniture.

There are various taxes imposed on living

animals, but the only important tax connected with dead ones is tax-iderm.

The small section of the public who pay their taxes on delivery are known amongst the fraternity as "Trojans." According to this, it would seem right to call a tax-gatherer a call-Hector.

Our own tax-collector informs us of rather a peculiar circumstance. He says that whenever people are unable to pay their water rate it's a sure sign they are going to liquidate.

All persons connected with the collection of rates acquire a vindictiveness and an obduracy of heart which are truly lamentable. The ancient "shears of fate" are reproduced in the modern ascossons of taxes.

Tax-collectors are occasionally a trifling poetical. We knew one exceedingly summary individual whose favourite quotation was "Dis-strain one more."

—Funny Folks.

It is claimed that a man never loses anything by politeness, but this has proved to be a mistake. As an old man lifted his hat to a young lady the wind carried away his wig.

THERE is a considerable difference between a man and a horse. The latter is good for nothing unless it is broke, and the former is good for nothing if he is broke.

"FROU-FROU!"

PROFESSOR TRISTAN (who has been chatting with Mrs. Lovelace—to Captain Lovelace, who has been waltzing with Mrs. Tristan): "What a lucky fellow you are, Lovelace! You can dance with my wife, and you're married to your own!"

Mrs. T. is telling Mrs. L. that to dance with Captain Lovelace is like being in Heaven.

—Punch.

LAND IN ENGLAND.

(A tragedy of the future.)

(Scene: A stately Home of England. Enter the Duke of Broadacres, soliloquising.)

DUKE: "The persistent and ever-increasing exportation of wheat, beef, and mutton by the Americans, the Australians, has at length made the farmer's life in England—saddled by us—a ridiculous impossibility; and the last agriculturist, a tenant of my own, emigrated to Manitoba yesterday. How hungry I am! And as my tenant was unable, after paying his steerage passage, to afford me anything towards my back rent, I am without a sixpence in the world. I will walk over to Lord Haviland's and endeavour to sell him the Home Farm for a trifle."

Walks into next county—it is only twenty miles or so of comparative wilderness—and finds Lord H. inhabiting the driest pigsty.

LOD H.: "Sorry to receive you here, duke, but fact is, Haviland Towers lets in the weather so confoundedly, and I haven't of course any money to spend on repairs. To what do I owe the pleasure—?"

DUKE: "Well—er—perhaps—you wanted it once, you know—you might feel inclined to purchase the Home Farm, five thousand acres arable and pasture, and going at—er—considering the awful state of the times, sixpence down, and a plate of eggs and bacon within the next half-hour."

LOD H.: "Good gracious, duke, what rubbish you talk! Sixpence? Eggs and bacon? Where on earth is a member of the landed classes to procure such things?"

DUKE: "But pity me! I am absolutely starving."

LOD H.: "Poor beggar! You do look sharp set, and no mistake. But cheer up. There's one turnip left in one of my fields a few farms off, and you're quite welcome to a share, Duke."

Duke sheds tears of gratitude. They reach the field and find the turnip gone.

LOD H.: "How! It has disappeared. What heartless villain can have stolen my sole hope of sustenance for the coming week?"

SIR WYLDE DOMAIN, BART. (who is seated on a neighbouring stile, devouring the last slice of turnip): "Behold that villain, my

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lord! I had tasted nothing for a fortnight, when chance threw me across your swede. But you are avenged, for, see, I die of too sudden indulgence in nourishment. Forgive me, and farewell!"

Dies. Duke and Lord H., unable to bear up under the disappointment, expire also, and England is landlordless. —Funny Folks.

GOODNESS!

WHEN a volunteer goes to Wimbledon, to which of the Law Courts does he direct the cabman to drive him?—Why, of course, "to the Common, please." —Judy.

HOW COULD IT HAVE BEEN?

LADY (who does not live entirely upon air): "Mary, are you sure this is the dress I dined in last Tuesday?"

MARY: "Yes, ma'am."

LADY: "It's very strange; it does not feel like it." —Judy.

A CLEAN "CHECK."

EXAMINER: "What is the meaning of the verb 'prepare'?"

SMALL BOY: "Dunno, sir."

EXAMINER: "What did you do before you came up for examination?"

SMALL BOY: "Er—washed my face!" —Fun.

SOMETHING LIKE A ONE.

WHY is a man who kicks out right and left like an ancient robber?—Because, don't you see? he is a free-booter. —Judy.

PEOPLE WILL JUDGE BY APPEARANCES.

(After the recent anniversary meeting of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.)

PORTER: "Not here, sir. This compartment's reserved for the bishops."

INDIGNANT ISRAELITE: "Bishops? Well, vat then? How do you know as I ain't a bishop?" —Judy.

YES, OR NO?

YE nymphs who muse on wedding chimes,

When asked, mind what you say:

"No may be said a no. of times,

But "aye" will last for aye." —Fun.

CAUTION.—Bacca orientalis is not Turkish tobacco. —Fun.

YOUTHFUL OBJECTION TO SOAP AND WATER.

MASTER JACK: "How often are the clothes washed, Emma?"

LAUNDRY MAID: "Once a week, Master Jack."

M. J.: "Only once a week!—then the clothes are much luckier than sis and me if that's all they get." —Fun.

MIDSUMMER EVE.

BLANCHE: "Delicious verses, aren't they, Algy? Now tell me, what passage in all the poets do you like the best?"

ALGY (who has long been wanting to change the subject to one more immediately interesting): "Well, I think I prefer the one in Dante, where he says, 'That night they read no more.'" —Fun.

CECIL'S FORTUNE.

CHAPTER XXV.

A WOULD-BE MURDERESS.

Whence comes she, this vision of sin,
Fair without and foul within,
With eyes of fire and lips rose red,
While snaked for hair twin round her head?

KATE knew perfectly that she was in deadly peril of her life when she saw those black eyes of Victorine's fixed so savagely upon her. She glanced back with a sick, hopeless feeling to

where the wooded precipice sloped away from her feet, a sheer descent of how many hundred feet?

She was shut off from the others of the party by the steep bank which sloped down from the ruins to the narrow ledge on which she stood. Victorine, strong and subtle as a snake, was half crouching on the steep bank ready to spring forward and thrust Kate back to destruction if she attempted to climb the bank.

On the other hand, if she remained standing where she was the wicked black-eyed wretch was prepared to fling herself upon her. Could not Kate have made an effort for her life? She might, but her frame was slight and delicate compared to that of the strong, supple female athlete Victorine Sala—she who had danced upon tight ropes in her girlhood, and leaped through hoops, alighting safely and softly on the back of her horse—she who had hung by the heels suspended at a terrible height above the area at the cirque in Paris.

Kate had heard this much of the early antecedents of Mademoiselle Victorine from Madam von Fitte, and the truth flashed upon her—the horrible truth that she had not the ghost of a chance of her life if it came to an encounter of strength with this horrible, handsome demon. Yes, Victorine was making a rapid descent upon her. Then she raised a cry—terrible, piercing, heartrending:

"Save me, save me! Help—help, she is coming to murder me!"

Victorine descended, it is true, rapidly and with her murderer hands outstretched, but it was not a place down which it would have been safe to run at headlong speed, for the ledge at the foot was narrow, and in case of a fall ten to one but the person falling would have been thrown over the edge of the precipice. Thus, Victorine, stealthy and cruel as a wild cat, had to make her descent with a certain caution.

Truly this woman was desperately anxious to take Kate's life—so anxious that she was willing even to risk something; she had stolen away from the rest of her party guided by some devilish instinct which told her that she would find the young marquise alone and quite unprotected; but when Kate raised that wild, imploring cry for help she raised her eyes and saw her husband descending the slope at a rapid pace behind Victorine, but Victorine did not see him, did not know that he was close behind her. Human souls are mysterious things. A sudden calmness, a stoical indifference to life, a sudden freedom from the fear of death, a strong, proud contempt filled Kate's whole being when she saw her husband coming so eagerly towards her.

"He is coming to help her to murder me," she said to herself. "Why should I struggle? Heaven will avenge me—I will die telling them both so, and since Henri is about to murder me, since I am hated by him to that degree it is as well that I should die—let me die."

Another moment and the murderous hands of Victorine would have clutched her, but Henri de St. Germaine was close behind her. He seized Victorine before she could touch Kate and dragged her with all his strength, not gently, to a little distance.

Kate's life was saved. There was a couple of minutes' silence between these three powerfully-agitated people. Victorine's face was perfectly hideous in its ghastly pallor, its horrible malignity; her great eyes glared on the marquis as if she would fain have murdered him—indeed, he may have feared some violence on the part of the woman who had so strongly fascinated him, for he did not release his hold of her arms. At last she spoke:

"What do you hold me like that for?" she hissed out, and she added a curse.

"Because I am afraid of what you may do, mademoiselle," the marquis said, gravely.

Kate heard all these angry words and her young heart stirred within her with a wild joy—Henri, her husband, had then come to his senses? He knew Victorine at length for what she was—an infamous adventuress, ripe for any crime, stained deep in the vices of a vicious age; a

selfish wretch with wild-beast instincts in spite of her warmly-tinted beauty and her undeniable talents.

Thoughts like these, words as burning, rushed through Kate's soul and strove to find utterance on her lips, but she exercised some degree of self-command. She could not wholly curb the fiery spirit within her, still she managed to speak with a dignified composure. She walked slowly up to her husband where he sat on the grass still holding tightly the wrists of Victorine.

"Do you believe me now, Henri, when I say that Mademoiselle Victorine is no fit guest for your wife to entertain?"

"I believe you," he answered. "I will not ask you to receive this lady again as a guest."

Somehow his words fell coldly on her anxious ears; he did not even look at her, he looked at the grass; his face was white and sad and stern. Alas, there was no gleam of love in his eyes—how quickly can the penetration of a wife detect that fact if it exists?

"Henri de St. Germaine," said Victorine, savagely, "you are a paltry hound—you tell me that you adore me, that you shall never rest until I become yours, and you know well that only as your marquise will I become yours, and when I could have hurled that puny wretch to the death which you more than I desire for her, you interpose; afraid of the law, I suppose."

"No, madam, for the law could only have reached you had you succeeded in killing my wife."

He uttered those two words, "my wife," with a certain keen and bitter emphasis; either he was bitterly sorry that sweet Kate was his wife, or else he was so mortally angry with Victorine that he delighted in wounding her by calling Kate his wife in her presence—it was probably a mixture of both feelings.

Victorine seemed half insane. Kate was not aware of the fact but Mademoiselle Sala had indulged very freely in champagne since the young marquise had separated herself from the others, she had likewise drunk some brandy out of a private gold flask that she carried; and she was in that state which, had she been dressed in sorry garments, a ragged skirt, a distorted bonnet, a soiled apron, a disreputable shawl, and had she been found, say, wandering in the neighbourhood of the Strand, in our great city of London, would most certainly have led to her being locked up for at least twenty-four hours in the custody of the police.

But a woman who has drunk too much brandy if she is clothed in silks and laces, and if she drives in a graceful chariot, is not judged by the same standard which condemns a ragged pedestrian to contempt and punishment.

"She is your wife," she hissed, "and you hate her as I do. You would give the whole world if she were dead and you could marry me; you know you would, deny it if you dare."

"I deny and affirm nothing, madam, to a lady in your state of excitement," said the marquis, with his masculine superiority of calm voice and iron nerve.

Truly, it was a difficult thing for him to steer between the conflicting passions of these two women, the one his outraged wife, the other the secret idol of his misdirected heart, whose blandishments intoxicated his senses—whose scorn cut him to the soul; to win whose love (alas, it was not to be won, for it did not exist, Victorine's nature was a mixture of the tigress and the rattlesnake)—to win whose love he would almost have bartered his immortal soul.

"You deny not—you affirm not," hissed Victorine. "Ah, I wish only that you had been standing near the edge and that I had hurled you into the next world."

"Kate," said the marquis, looking now for the first time at his wife, "go away, ma chère, and make preparations for our return. Scandal must be avoided if possible, thus we will all return to Bronté and dine; after that mademoiselle and our other guests will return to the chateau of the Baron Plomb."

Kate shook like a leaf, but her husband did

not notice her tremor and pallor as she moved away slowly and took the narrow path which wound round the side of the hill to the road where the carriage was waiting for them. The most glorious scenery in Europe was spread out before her, but she saw it not—not all that wealth of wood and vale and glorious water course, and noble mountain range with snow-capped peaks, half hidden in the golden haze of the heavens. No, she only thought one burning thought, pure, true, suffering heart:

"And does my husband wish me dead? And if he does, why then did he not allow her to kill me?"

She reached the carriage and found Madam von Fitté and Monsieur Pierre eating tongue sandwiches and drinking burgundy; they remarked on her pallor and invited her to sit down and partake of the same refreshments. She sat down and tried to eat, but it seemed as if every morsel of food would choke her. At last she heard their footsteps and voices.

In some way the marquis had succeeded in soothing Victorine. She was rather pale and her great dark eyes flamed, but she was tolerably quiet. She took her place in the carriage, the servants were called, and the party drove back towards Chateau Bronté.

One glance the marquis gave towards Kate, it was an inquiring one which asked if she had spoken of the murderous attack of Victorine to the others; she gave him a pale, quiet, reassuring look. How was it that the man was so callous to so much grace, so much beauty, so much goodness—how was it that even while he sat by the side of Kate and acknowledged to his own heart that he could not again introduce Mademoiselle Salsé as a visitor under the same roof with Kate—how was it that he was occupied in schemes which had for their end and aim the bringing Victorine again within the reach of him somewhere where he could at least see her once a day?

To him she professed the most rigid prudery. She had not allowed him to kiss her hand without scolding him for taking the liberty; she wanted to be Marquise of St. Germaine, and one day Duchess of Montalbert, and she knew that to achieve this end she must stand in Kate's place, she must still hold complete sway over the heart of the marquis.

Thus she baffled him, she enchanted him, she enthralled him as only a finished coquette, who is perfectly heartless, could have done, and the marquis, who knew that she was vile, and that Kate was a saint, yet could not shake off her chains; and so they arrived at home at Chateau Bronté, and the ladies dressed for dinner.

Kate found the watchful eyes of Pomfret fixed on her while she bound up her hair. It had struck that young woman as extraordinary that the marquise had never once reproached her with being the cruel author of the trick which had separated her from Cecil Renfrew. She felt that the silence was ominous. Kate never now told her of her troubles, or confided to her her hopes.

"Your ladyship looks pale—as if you had been unpleasantly excited," began Pomfret.

"And if so I had better not speak of what is unpleasant," said Kate, calmly. "Will you finish my hair, and I will wear my crimson silk since I look pale."

"Rather your black velvet with coral ornaments, dear Lady Kate."

"No, no, my crimson, and some natural roses à gloire de Dijon. No gold, silver, or precious stones."

Kate persisted, and she looked supremely lovely in her crimson silk and white gloire de Dijon roses. She entered the dining-hall with the step and carriage of a young queen, and something said to her: "Never mind, a higher and holier destiny is in store for me. I am to be a mother, and the love for my child will fill my whole heart with a new rapture."

Kate did honour to her lady mother's training during the dinner, and the hour or two that elapsed before the departure of Victorine, for she did depart just as the moon rose over the mountains in a luxurious coach accompanied by

her two friends, and with all her luggage safely packed in the vehicle.

She had no repose of manner, this violent Victorine; she had sulked all through the dinner. Now and then she had put on a certain insolence which, by dint of her Juno-like form and her superb carriage, some would have deemed very grand; but she was actively anxious the whole time to insult the wife of the man whom she would fain have married.

When she was gone, and Kate was left alone with her husband on the terrace of the chateau, she walked up to him and laid her hand on his arm.

"The events of this day shall never be alluded to by me," she said, "if you will promise, Henri, not to seek that woman again."

He laughed a nervous sort of laugh, but he drew his wife close to him. He bent down, and he kissed her with some show of fondness.

"We will go away; we will return to England," he said. "I am tired now of this gloomy chateau. We will try and forget Victorine and—everything."

His arm encircled her waist; her soft cheek was pressed to his shoulder. They stood on the stone terrace in the moonlight, and a kind of hope sprang up in Kate's heart. Alas! was it soon to be dashed to the ground? That evening the marquis and his beautiful young wife supped together, and the marquis was cheerful, bright, affectionate, almost as he had been during the first days of their marriage.

"I am winning him back; he is learning again to love me. I am glad that terrible woman tried to murder me!" Kate said to herself, "for it has opened his eyes. Even while he thinks her beautiful, he must know most certainly she is wicked."

And then Kate, who had been much excited, and was not well, retired to rest, and the marquis strolled on again on the moonlit terrace with his cigar.

"Kate is like a pure lily, tall and graceful and lovely," he said to himself. "When I reflect how good she is; when I see how beautiful she is, I ought to honour and love her before all other beings on the earth. But Victorine—hang the woman—how is it, then, that her eyes haunt me so? There never surely were such eyes as hers before since the world was made, unless they belonged to some such siren as Cleopatra or Helen of Troy. Ah, I will put the sea between us, and forget her as fast as I can—forget her burning glances and the pressure of her warm white hands and her smile, bright as lightning and as cruel. Great Heaven, suppose only that I had not been in time, and that she had killed poor little Kate. Should I have forgiven her—should I have married her? Ah, I believe that I am so eager to possess her and call her mine—the cold, senseless, maddening creature—that I should have married the demon—the beautiful demon; and then as sure as I am alive I should have hated her in a little time. How strange it is that I, knowing this—knowing that she is possessed only by ambition and the love of greed; that she cares no more for me than for a painted wax dummy in a hairdresser's shop—that I, knowing this, would marry her to-morrow if I could. Still, I would not hurt one hair of Kate's golden head, poor, good, beautiful child!"

Thus far had he progressed in his reverie when he thought that he heard footsteps approaching at the farther end of the stone terrace. He held his cigar end between his fingers listening eagerly. His heart beat fast. Victorine—could she be coming? Had she jumped out of the carriage and returned? Had she lurked about until she fancied that Kathleen had retired, and now was she coming to cajole him—to tempt him, perhaps—who could say?—to ask him to fly with her? "And if so, my poor Kate—it might not be the worst thing for you in the end, for her snares will only be broken when I have conquered her."

He listened attentively—eagerly; he looked along the line of terrace, and at last he saw a female form approaching swiftly. It was not Victorine. The eye of love is quick, and Henri

saw that it was not the actress who was coming towards him—a tall, slender form clothed in a dark dress. The woman came up and stood close to him, and as the moonlight fell upon her it revealed the face of Pomfret.

"Pardon, Monsieur le Marquis," she said, hastily, "I have long watched for an opportunity of speaking to you alone, and now that the visitors are gone—"

She paused.

"Well, mademoiselle, and what have you to say to me?" the marquis asked, in a somewhat peevish tone.

He did not like being interrupted in his train of thought, and he was disappointed that Victorine, that beautiful would-be murderer, had not returned to him.

"Monsieur, I do not like hypocrisy, nor to see you driving away your friends because madam is jealous, when madam herself is playing you false!"

"Ah! take care, woman, what you assert. You speak of the Marquise of St. Germaine."

"I know everything, my lord. I lived with madam for years when she was Lady Kate Ormond, and of all the madcaps! She used to take cabs and go off to dances at various dancing saloons; she used to go masked. I used to let her in and let her out. Nobody at the dancing saloons ever guessed who she was, and she only went in the spirit of fun and mischief. Very silly, but yet nothing absolutely wrong. You know the English, even the highest of them, give their children such liberty; it is quite shameful in my opinion."

Pomfret told these abominable falsehoods of Kate, who had never in her life been anywhere in the evenings without the knowledge of the countess, except to have her fortune told, and the night she exchanged costumes with Pomfret, and both of these escapades had been arranged by the perfidious maid herself.

"Why did you encourage her in such madcap pranks?" cried the marquis. "But it is past now. It was only the folly of a child—dangerous folly; but the marquise was innocence itself when she became my wife."

Pomfret sneered.

"She might have been innocent then, but since that time, in this very house, she has received a visit from her former lover, the secretary of the earl. I was in the inner room, and I heard all that was said."

The marquis was silent. Rage against Kate, for whose sake this selfish man fancied that he had denied himself the pleasure of Victorine's society, rose up like a giant in his soul.

"And tell me what passed," he said, sternly, at last to Pomfret.

"He told her that a mistake had caused him to delay meeting her at the church where they were to have been married, and she in her anger then married you, my lord."

"Very pleasant for me to hear, certainly," said the marquis, with a short, hard laugh. "Well, and has there been only this interview?"

"I believe only that one, my lord. The lover knelt at her feet and swore eternal faith; and she wept and told him he had broken her heart. Oh, it was quite a romantic scene, I assure you. Then before he took his departure it was arranged that they were to meet in London. Now, my lord, I do not say that the marquise has gone any further than a very foolish flirtation."

"Why then?" asked the marquis, with a ferocious oath which made Pomfret execrate him in her heart—"why, then, do you tell me all this tale?"

"Only, my lord, because I wish you to be free to do as you choose, not to think that madam is a saint when she is only a vain woman, fond of admiration, and when she loves the secretary all the while ten times more than she loves you. I will watch her, my lord, when we return to town and report, and if you catch her in any way, why should you not divorce her and be free, and marry who you like?"

"Victorine has paid this woman to talk to me in this way, and she is an infamous wretch. I will not believe a word against Kate. Still,

July 17, 1880.

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to talk to us wretched. Still,

if it were true, and if she ever met the fellow again, or even spoke to him, I would do as I like in regard to Victrine."

But the marquis was too proud to allow Miss Pomfret to guess that she had made the slightest impression. She left him after making a graceful courtesy, of which he took no notice, and he sat out on the moonlit terrace thinking for a full hour, when the night wind arose rather chill and drove him into the chateau with his teeth chattering and his temper soured.

"Confound it all!" he said. "What aigma and perplexities women are."

CHAPTER XXVI.

JULIANA.

She loved him with a love that was half hate, And then she vowed his ruin early and late. She followed him with secret, stealthy steps.

JULIANA LAWSON had at length returned to the home in Kent, the pretty villa residence called The Laurels, to which sylvan retreat she had, it will be remembered, invited Cecil Renfrew. At The Laurels Miss Lawson was a great person. Her father was one of the richest men in the little village of Chelbury, and the small celebrities of the neighbourhood delighted to do her honour.

Mr. Lawson was rather a saving man. His family did not live up to his income of seven hundred a year, but yet the house was replete with every comfort, the gardens were delightful. Mr. Lawson prided himself upon his wall fruit and his hothouse grapes. He kept a small stock of very choice wine in his cellars.

When he gave a dinner party it was done in good style. He would not have had an electroplated fork on his table, and the flowers, glass, and dinner services were all very handsome. In short, it was easy to see that the Lawsons were in the most comfortable circumstances, and many young men raised their eyes longingly towards Julianiana and her fifteen thousand pounds in perspective.

That damsel, meanwhile, had never ceased to think of Cecil Renfrew. Pomfret, who counted upon her for an ally in the future, wrote to her regularly, and told her all the news respecting Lady Kate and Cecil. Renfrew. When first Julianiana learned of the scene in the church, of Cecil's despair and wild flight, she was frantic with suppressed wrath. Then she heard that he had disappeared, and after a while Pomfret, who thought she was on the Continent with her mistress, yet watched affairs at home, aided by the mysterious mother Shipton—Pomfret, we repeat, wrote her word that Cecil had thrown up his situation, had been ill, had arisen from his bed poor and shabby and penniless, and had gone nobody knew whither. Julianiana was distracted. She advertised in all the daily papers, calling upon Cecil to communicate with one who loved him, and giving an address at a certain Post Restante in the W.C. district; but no answer came to Julianiana's appeal.

At length she consented to go down to The Laurels with her parents, and those good folks did all they could to make the time pass pleasantly for their daughter. They gave croquet and lawn-tennis parties, and picnic and water parties, and Julianiana, in return, was of course invited by the magnates of the neighbourhood to join in the like festivities.

Mr. Renfrew, senior, came into the village of Chelbury, and took up his abode at the chief hotel. He was a constant guest at The Laurels, and he continued to pour his flatteries unceasingly into the ear of the heiress. For her part Julianiana only tolerated him because he was the father of Cecil, and she always fancied that sooner or later he would have news of his traitor son, and that by this means she might learn what had befallen Cecil. But the sunny month of July, August, and September passed away, and still Julianiana had heard nothing of the idol of her heart.

The elder Renfrew, meanwhile, was living quite sumptuously and luxuriously at the White

Hart Hotel; he paid ready money for everything, wore the most expensive clothes, drank champagne like water, and gave it out that the company to which he belonged was fast realising a large fortune. He had not been able to persuade wise old Mrs. Lawson to invest so much as a twenty-pound note in the scheme.

"That man is too old to be your husband, Julianiana, my love," the old gentleman said one day to his daughter.

Whereat Julianiana had tossed her head and bid her father be under no uneasiness on her account.

"I hate old men, except you, papa," said the gracious young lady.

It was one fine day in October, one of those golden days in the fall of the year which cheat us into the belief that summer has come back again.

"Let us make up a water party for the last time this season," said old Mr. Lawson, "and let us take provisions and lunch in the boat-house in the woods."

The scheme met with approval. There were staying in the house two young ladies named Williams, and their brother, a tall, solemn youth in spectacles, who was studying for the church, and he, since he was far from rich, and was ambitious of worldly prosperity, and also prominent in his profession of 'Holy Orders', thought that to marry a young lady with fifteen thousand pounds in perspective might be a good thing for him. Thus, though he did not admire Julianiana at all, he honestly strove to like her, and to make himself agreeable to her, for Mr. Charles Williams had never been in love, and he never intended to be, he considered it too expensive a luxury for him to indulge in.

As for Julianiana, she cared not a fig for the spectacled young person in embryo; but she agreed to the water party, and as the river was only about half a mile distant from The Laurels she set off to walk there with her young friends. Her parents, who knew that the day's pleasure entailed some fatigue, followed in a carriage with the dainty provisions for the day, and thus Julianiana arrived at the riverside some time before Mr. and Mrs. Lawson.

It was a lovely day, warm as a June day could be, and there was a mellow softness in the air which seemed to speak of peace and hope, and the promise of happiness in store to those who allowed themselves to be influenced by the sweets of Nature. Miss Julianiana Lawson was not at all that kind of person, however. She was a strange mixture of practical hardness and strong passions.

For her the waters had no brightness, nor were there any dreams lingering in their glassy depths; the glories of the autumn woodland, which bordered the brink of the river were far more meaningless than the show of bonnets at Madam Louise's, in Regent Street, and the song of the lark was but a tiresome, shrill noise in her ear.

She was becomingly attired in an autumn costume of fine chocolate coloured-cloth. She wore a hat of the same, with a gold-coloured feather, but no costumer's art could lend an atom of grace to her short and dumpy form, and the pretty hat shaded a fat, pale, ill-tempered face. There were a boat and a couple of boatmen making for the party from The Laurels.

"I think it is an abominably tiring day," said Julianiana. "For my part I hate these warm, damp days, when the sun seems to be making the earth steam like a wet towel hung before a fire. I am thoroughly tired even with that half-mile's walk."

Now, as Julianiana was very fat perhaps she would have been wiser had she walked a little more. The Misses Williams, who were slim and upright, ran about gathering wild flowers, which they put into their pretty little baskets. Miss Lawson took her seat in the boat and shaded her face from the rays with her parasol, and young Mr. Williams took his place by her side, as in duty bound. All at once there came the sound of music from behind a bend in the river—a flute played with an exquisite finish, accompanied by the strings of a harp.

"Oh, how lovely!" cried the Misses Williams. "That's an air from Hernani, our favourite opera."

As for Julianiana, she had not much real taste for music, although she played and sang a little, as we know.

"Only a rabbishing flute and harp," she said the next moment.

The boat containing the musicians turned the bend in the river, and at once Julianiana's plump face flushed to a deep crimson. Her small eyes seemed starting out of her head; she leant forward and uttered a faint cry. Mr. Williams thought she was ill.

"What is the matter, Miss Lawson?" he cried.

"Nothing. Please don't speak to me. I think I see a friend in that boat."

Now, the boat was a large one, containing about twenty persons, evidently bent on a pleasure excursion. Among them were an old man, who was playing the harp, and a young man, who was playing the flute. The young man was Cecil Renfrew. How pale he looked; how gaunt; how shabbily he was dressed; what a wild air of Bohemianism he possessed. He never saw Julianiana; his eyes were looking at the water dreamily, and the melody of his flute filled the air with its sweetness.

"Oh, where are they going to?" Julianiana asked of the men in her own boat.

"It's a picnic party, miss. They two players, the old man and the young, are come from nobody knows where. Some say it's a nobleman and his son going about under false names; they play at picnics and water parties and charge very cheap. There's to be a ball at the 'White Hart' to-night, and they are to play there."

"At the 'White Hart'? Then they lodge in the village?"

"Yes, miss, at the 'Skylark Inn.' They seem poor enough; if it's pretence or not I can't say. I have heard of gentlefolks shamming poor like that, but it do seem odd; the 'Skylark' is but a poor place."

"Good heavens, he must be mad!" said Julianiana to herself; "but mad or not he is the only man I could ever marry, and I am sure he is poor. I will tell him with my own lips before this night is over that I mean to give him all I possess in the world if he will have me!"

How that day passed Julianiana could never remember. The people in the boat with the eight rowers went much farther up the river than the Lawsons' boat could go, so that she saw nothing of Cecil all day, and her party returned to The Laurels to be in time for the six o'clock dinner long before the musicians returned from the picnic party.

Julianiana generally thought a great deal of her dinner and of how it was dressed, but on this day she knew not if she was eating roast ducks or boiled bacon. After dinner she said that she had a headache and must go to bed. She went to her room, requesting that a hot cup of tea might be sent up to her.

"I shall then lock my door," she said, "since I hate to be disturbed."

And Miss Lawson did lock her door, but there was another door in her room which led through a bath-room into a conservatory, and thence down a flight of steps into the garden. Miss Lawson enveloped herself in a long cloak and put an insignificant black hat on her head. Thus attired, she crept down the steps and into the garden, and so on to the village.

The moon was shining; there was a brisk breeze astir, and Julianiana felt it fan her hot face pleasantly as she hurried toward the "Skylark Inn." It was a very mean little hotel, with only three windows in all in front, and with an old barn behind, where the landlord kept an elderly cow and some poultry.

There was a creaking signboard outside, and a horse trough in which were the heads of two poor, tired and thirsty beasts. There was a flaming gaslight in the little taproom; the window was open, and the sound of boisterous laughter came to the ears of the young lady; but she never stopped; she walked straight in at the open door and penetrated to the little



[WOMAN'S HATE.]

bar, where Mrs. Hobbs, the landlady, was rinsing some wineglasses.

"If you please," said Juliana, "I want to see Mr. Renfrew."

The landlady stared. In a small place like Chelbury everyone knows everyone by sight, thus Mrs. Hobbs knew Juliana, and she was very much surprised to see her at the "Sky-lark Inn."

"Mr. Renfrew, miss. There is no such person here."

"Yes, there is," said Juliana. "If he calls himself even by some other name. I mean the gentleman who plays the flute."

"Ah, the young man?" Mrs. Hobbs said, with a smile. "I think he's very poor, miss, whoever he is, and lodges in the first little room upstairs. Do you want him, miss?"

"Yes, on important business—is there anywhere where I could see him alone?"

"Yes, miss; in my little sitting-room."

"Stop, Mrs. Hobbs, don't tell him who I am, tell him a person wants to see him about the ball at the hotel."

"Yes, miss; but please step just into my little room, it's a poor little place to ask a lady into, but such as it is, miss."

Juliana had no patience to listen to the apologies of Mrs. Hobbs, she walked straight into the mean little room, and paced up and down while the landlady lighted the gas and put the chairs straight. Then away went Mrs. Hobbs, and Juliana's heart beat loudly. She heard returning footsteps, not those of Mrs. Dobbs; another moment and Cecil Renfrew entered the room. He started and drew a step back when he saw Juliana Lawson, but it was too late now to beat a retreat. He removed his hat and stood pale, gaunt, wide-eyed, looking in amaze at the young lady who had sought him in his lowly abode. How shabby he was, how haggard, how ill—what a wreck of the bright, self-reliant young man of a few months back. Juliana held out her hands towards him.

"Mr. Renfrew."

"Don't call me by that name, I have dropped

it, at least, for the present; while I lead the wild Bohemian life of a travelling musician. I have not health for close employment; I have been ill, and the idea of being shut up within four walls obliged to write for hours makes me half mad."

"Mr. Renfrew," said Juliana, "I have heard of your disappointment. She was not worthy of you."

"I was not worthy of her," he burst forth, "or I should have trusted her through all and prevented that hideous mockery of marriage without love—I should have suspected treachery."

"But strong, wise man does not lose his head for the sake of a woman," said Juliana. "There are other women in the world, Mr. Renfrew, women with brains and common sense, better than a fine lady full of fancies like that fast creature Lady Kate."

"There may be women overloaded with practical common sense, Miss Lawson, but I do not covet their society."

"No," said Juliana, "not hard-hearted creatures who would despise you for being poor, but I, Mr. Renfrew, I pity you from my soul, and I have loads of money—you have but to speak and I will place a thousand pounds at your command."

For if Cecil had said that he would take it, Juliana would have managed to get it somehow out of her father.

"Miss Lawson," said Cecil, "you are very kind. I deserve nothing at your hands and I will take nothing."

"Will you not take me, Cecil Renfrew, to be your wife? I, who love you more than my life, I, who have fifteen thousand pounds of my own."

"Stop, Miss Lawson, you must not say another word."

Juliana, in her mad, unmaidenly love, was rushing towards Cecil with outstretched arms.

"Stop," said he, "I must not allow you to speak words which you will regret. It is impossible. I shall never marry."

Juliana Lawson started back white as a corpse. "Do you refuse me even when I plead to you in person? You refused me by letter, but now do you refuse me again when I plead to you with my own voice?"

"Yes," said Cecil, "I do; there must be no mistake this time. It is not my fault. I never paid you attention in all my life. I never led you to think—"

"Stop," said Juliana—she was livid, she gnashed her teeth—"you shall live to repent this in dust and ashes, in chains and servitude. I have sworn that I would bring you to be a penal convict, and I will."

Then she hissed out a curse like low muttered thunder between her clenched teeth, and she rushed like a maniac out of the house.

The Marquis de St. Germaine had a lovely seat in the rich, beautiful county of Hereford. It was called West Leighton; he had gone there with Kate for the hunting season, and he had filled the house with London and Paris visitors, the gayest of the gay.

Ever since Pomfret had poured into his ears those evil words against his wife he had been suspicious and cold, and, on the whole, unkind, though outwardly polite and pleasant; but, as time went on, the young marquise awoke every day more keenly to the knowledge of the bitter fact that she did not possess his love.

Pomfret she had dismissed on her return to England, making the perfidious creature a handsome present, but telling her that she knew her for her secret and dangerous enemy; and she had now in her place a young French girl called Suzette, who was really devoted to her.

The hunting season was nearly over, it was a fine March and the marquis said that he must soon return to town for the season. One day Kate returned rather late from a drive, she was alone, she heard voices, and looking into the dining-room saw Victorine Sala amongst the guests.

(To be Continued.)



[THE SURPRISE.]

MINNIE'S ROMANCE. (A COMPLETE STORY.)

CHAPTER I.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, on a bright summer's day, when a well-appointed brougham drove up to the office of Mr. Thomas Hughes, a solicitor in Bedford Row, London. A young gentleman, faultlessly dressed, stepped out and entered the clerk's office, which was on the ground floor.

He was about twenty-three years of age and strikingly handsome, having dark hair and eyes, well-chiselled features, and a singularly symmetrical figure, which was admirably set off by his well-fitting frockcoat, and in the buttonhole of which was a rich China rose. His face was set off by a heavy moustache, which curled at the ends à la militaire.

There were two clerks in the office, who both rose at his entering as if he was a client of importance, and leaving the papers which they were engaged upon, one offered him a chair, while the other went to a room marked private, to announce his arrival. He presently returned, saying:

"Mr. Hughes desires that you will be good enough to step in, Mr. Beresford."

The young gentleman gave him a careless nod, and walked into the lawyer's sanctum sanctorum, in which he found an admirably preserved specimen of a middle-aged man, fat, sleek, prosperous and contented.

"Good-day, sir," exclaimed the latter. "I am happy to state that your business is finally settled."

"That is good news," replied Mr. Beresford, "you have been long enough about it. Why it is over twelve months since my uncle died."

"Quite correct; but the law has its delays. I have taken out letters of administration, paid

legacy duty and proved probate. You are now the fortunate possessor of one hundred thousand pounds, which is paid into the Bank of England in your name. Here is a cheque and pass book. I wish you joy, sir, I wish you joy."

"Thank you," was the reply, as a gratified flush came over the young man's face.

Charles Beresford was the son of a poor curate, who had made great sacrifices to send him to a university, and afterwards to educate him for the bar. He had looked forward to a life of hard work, if not of absolute drudgery. But when he became a barrister and was waiting for practice to come, a rich uncle died in India, and left him the splendid fortune of which the solicitor had spoken.

"I presume," said Mr. Hughes, who had been the uncle's lawyer and agent for many years, "that you will scarcely care about practising at the bar, now you are a rich man?"

"No, indeed," answered Charles Beresford. "The profession is already over crowded, and as I have more than enough for my wants, I will not take the bread out of the mouths of those who have not been so favoured by fortune as I have."

"A very wise resolution, sir, and one that does you credit."

"No, Mr. Hughes," continued Charles Beresford. "I shall buy a little property in the country, where the shooting and hunting are good, and—a—in fact, shall marry and settle down."

"Marry?" repeated Mr. Hughes, "you are going to think of matrimony?"

"I am domesticated and fond of children."

"Shall you marry for money?"

"Indeed, no," answered Charles Beresford, "why should I? My intention is to wed the first nice girl I meet, if I believe that I really love her, and it will make no difference if she is as poor as a church mouse."

"I respect you for such a determination," exclaimed Mr. Hughes, who was apparently much impressed at the opinion expressed by his client, "and now we have brought our busi-

ness to a satisfactory conclusion, may I beg the favour of your company to dinner at my house some day this week?"

"I shall be delighted to dine with you."

"Name your own day."

"Let me see. This is Monday. To-morrow I have a party at the club. Wednesday I am engaged to Lord Harrington in Belgrave Square. Shall I say Thursday?"

"By all means. Thursday be it," replied Mr. Hughes. "Here is my private address, Virginia House, Holmesdale Road, Kilburn. It is an easy drive from the West End."

Mr. Charles Beresford shook hands cordially with the lawyer, and took his departure, very much pleased to think that all the formalities connected with his uncle's legacy had been successfully settled. He was now a rich man, and hoped that he had a long life of enjoyment before him.

All he wanted was a nice little estate and a pretty wife, whom he could love with all the strength of his nature, for her own sweet sake. He was not in the slightest degree selfish, and he firmly believed that there was more happiness to be found in the wedded state than in single blessedness.

Mr. Hughes was also quite satisfied with himself. His bill of costs amounted to a good round sum, and, as he chuckled to himself, it was evident that the legal spider had ulterior designs upon the gilded fly.

He left the office soon after Charles Beresford had gone, and returned home early, which was an unusual thing for him to do, as he was a hard worker. He lived in some style for a man in his position, having one of the best houses in Kilburn, elegantly furnished, and standing in its own grounds.

His family consisted of himself and his wife, a motherly woman of forty-five, two daughters and a son, aged fourteen, who to the great disgust of his sisters, to whom he was a great torment, was home for the holidays. The eldest daughter, Beatrice, was a tall, slim, slightly angular beauty, undeniably good-looking. She

knew her own charms, dressed well, played and sang nicely, and at the age of nineteen announced her intention of making a good marriage.

Pauline, the second daughter, was a little thing, not exactly pretty, but having a good-tempered expression, which made up for physical defects, and she was decidedly more popular than her sister, who was cold, distant, and even arrogant, in her manner. We must not omit to mention another person who was an inmate of Mr. Hughes's household.

This was Miss Minnie Palmer, governess to the young ladies. Minnie was an orphan. Her father had been a doctor, but when he died he left no money behind him, and she was forced to fall back upon the education she had received. Fate threw her into the family of Mr. Hughes, and for a moderate stipend she taught the girls French, German, music, and other accomplishments which are in these days considered indispensable.

Minnie was as pretty as a picture, and her beauty was enhanced by her modest retiring demeanour, which heightened her attractions. She may be described as fair and fragile, for she was anything but strong. Her auburn hair was a great contrast to Beatrice's raven locks. Though poorly dressed she was always neat, and she had a way of turning her dresses and retrimming them, which enabled her to look nice upon next to nothing a year.

Beatrice was fond of taking Minnie Palmer out for a walk, as she thought the poor governess set her off. She never imagined for a moment that men who looked at them were bestowing their regards on Minnie; but, as a matter of fact, the latter was more interesting with her blue eyes and dove-like look than was Beatrice with her commanding presence and her tigerish air.

The blue serge dress of the poor dependent was quite as attractive as the silk or the velvet of the tragedy-queen-like lawyer's daughter. When Mr. Hughes alighted from his omnibus he walked quickly to Virginia House and found his family assembled in the drawing-room. Minnie Palmer was seated at the piano teaching Beatrice a new song. Pauline was turning an old skirt, Mrs. Hughes was dozing over a cup of tea, and Tommy was industriously killing flies in the window.

"You are home early!" exclaimed Mrs. Hughes. "Why I didn't expect you for two hours yet."

"Papa's done a good stroke of business," said Tommy. "Look out for new dresses, girls. Ma will get that carriage she wants before she dies."

Mr. Hughes frowned upon his son and heir.

"Leave the room, sir!" he cried.

"Don't ask me to do that, pa," replied Tommy, with a comical expression. "My absence would leave a blank which you would find it impossible to fill up."

"I shall not ask you again," exclaimed his father, sternly.

"Farewell," said Tom, "you shall see me again on the lawn outside. I will play tennis all by myself to divert you and console you for—"

He was not allowed to finish his speech, as his father strode up, grasped him by the collar, and opening the door thrust him out.

"My dear," exclaimed the lawyer, "that boy ought not to be allowed to come home during the holidays; he is a perpetual nuisance!"

"Don't be hard on him," pleaded his mother. "Boys will be boys; but never mind him, tell me the news. I know you would not come home so early if you had not something to communicate."

Mr. Hughes coughed and held up his hand, as if he wished for complete silence. Minnie stopped playing, and Beatrice took a seat on the sofa by her mother. Pauline had great difficulty to prevent laughing, as Tommy was looking in at the window and making faces at her.

"Possibly," he said, "you have heard me speak of a rich client of mine."

"Oh, yes," replied Mrs. Hughes; "you mean the poor barrister to whom you gave a few

briefs before he came into the fortune his uncle left him."

"Precisely; but he is poor no longer. In fact he is magnificently rich. I have invited him to dine with us on Thursday, and I want to give him a dinner such as he would get at the most fashionable reception at the West End."

"It will cost a great deal of money," remarked Mrs. Hughes. "You may just as well save it. Why cannot he dine with us in the usual way?"

"I want to impress him."

"That is your 'want,'" Mrs. Hughes said testily. "I and the girls have our wants. We want dresses, and we want to go to the seaside, and—"

"My dear," interrupted Mr. Hughes, "Mr. Beresford also has a want."

"What may that be?"

"He wants a wife!" replied the lawyer, with a bland smile—"a wife, my dear, and as you have two daughters to marry, I think it might be worth your while to go to a little expense to entertain him."

This announcement put an entirely different complexion on the case, and all the ladies became greatly interested in the matter. They wanted to know what Mr. Beresford was like, and when they heard that he was handsome as well as rich, their interest in him increased.

"Leave it all to me," exclaimed Mrs. Hughes.

"I will have everything sent in from the confectioner's, and the greengrocer's young man can wait at table. All you will have to do, John, will be to provide the wines. Shall you ask anyone to meet Mr. Beresford?"

"No. Our own party will be sufficient."

Pauline put her arm round her sister's waist and asked her what she was going to wear.

"My maroon-coloured velvet, unless papa buys me a new dress," replied Beatrice, admiring her superb form in a mirror.

"And I?" continued Pauline. "Poor I. Nobody will care, I suppose, if I put on the oldest thing I've got."

"My dear Pauline," exclaimed Beatrice, "you are only a girl, and you cannot expect Mr. Beresford to notice you. He is invited expressly to meet me."

"Yes, I know all that, Beattie," replied Pauline. "Still, I like to look as nice as I can. Then there is Minnie; she will dine at our table."

"I don't see why Miss Palmer cannot dine by herself after us," said Beatrice.

"Oh, Beattie!"

"Oh, Pauline!" cried Beatrice. "What is there astonishing in that? She has nothing to wear, and—"

Minnie, who had not yet spoken, coloured up to the eyes and looked deeply hurt.

"You need not be afraid I shall disgrace you!" she exclaimed. "I have my old black silk."

"The one you have worn ever since you came here!"

"Yea. It is the one I always go to church in. You said it looked as good as new last Sunday."

"Well, it does not much matter, as I don't suppose Mr. Beresford will say two words to you, and I shall tell him who you are the first chance I get. As long as he does not take you for any relation of ours I do not care."

With this contemptuous speech, Miss Hughes went over to the sofa and sat down between her father and her mother to arrange the details of the grand party which was to be given in honour of Mr. Beresford. Their object was to impress him, for they wanted him to marry their daughter, and though that young lady had never seen the gentleman, she was in no way averse to the project.

Life as the wife of a gentleman with one hundred thousand pounds was in her opinion preferable to existence as the unmarried daughter of a hardworking solicitor living in the suburbs. Great preparations were made for the reception of Mr. Beresford, as a matter of course.

Beatrice had a new dress. It was a marvel of the dressmaker's art, and none the worse be-

cause it was bought at a fashionable emporium in Oxford Street. They did not expect their visitor until the evening, and Mrs. Hughes went out for a walk in the afternoon with her daughters. Mr. Hughes was at the office, having received instructions to buy certain fruits and flowers at Covent Garden and come home in a cab.

Minnie Palmer was in the garden, sitting under a weeping willow tree, tacking some lace on the bodice of a dress for Pauline, and Tom was making what he was pleased to call a cat trap, near the wall—he had been reading lately about the trappers of the far West and how they caught game by digging pit falls; so he dug a hole in the ground, which he intended to cover up with boughs and grass, so that when the unwary cat jumped from the wall into the garden he would fall into the trap, which was rendered all the more attractive by a pennyworth of cat's meat placed in the middle.

The gate was left open and Minnie, who was thinking how nice Beatrice would look that evening, was startled by hearing a footstep on the gravel walk. Looking up she beheld a handsome young man, hesitating which way he should go. Seeing her, his indecision ended, and he advanced in her direction, lifting his hat politely.

"I apprehend that I am addressing Miss Hughes," he exclaimed.

Minnie coloured deeply and replied in the negative.

"Pardon me if I have indeed made a mistake," he continued. "This is certainly Virginia Villa, Kilburn. There may be other Virginia Villas, however, and—"

"You are quite right so far," Minnie hastened to reply, "this is Mr. Hughes's house. We expect a gentleman to dinner."

"In that case I'm all right. My name is Beresford. I am a little earlier possibly than I ought to be, but the day was so lovely that I was tempted to leave town before the best part of the day was lost."

"You will be very welcome, I am sure," replied Minnie, in her sweet, low voice, which Beatrice always said was the height of affection.

"May I ask whom I have the honour of addressing?" Charles Beresford inquired.

"I am the governess," Minnie answered. "No relation whatever to the family, who, I regret, are all out."

Master Tom had been listening to the conversation and thought it was time for him to say something.

"No, they're not," he exclaimed, "I'm at home. Mr. Beresford need not run away."

"Do not be alarmed," replied Charles, laughing. "You have such a nice place here I feel inclined to stop a week."

"Stop a month if you like, we shall be glad to have you. I say, can you snare cats?"

Charles confessed that his education in this particular had been neglected, and that he was sorry he could not assist his young friend in his praiseworthy efforts to snare the disturber of nocturnal peace, at which admission the respect in which Tom seemed to hold him at first began to steadily decline. Charles had been into society a good deal and had seen many acknowledged beauties, but he confessed to himself that he had never beheld anyone so attractive as Minnie Palmer.

Young, fresh, innocent, her charms unenhanced by cosmetic, she could scarcely be said to have arrived at maturity; he had not been with her five minutes before he owned the tender passion. There was a magnetic attraction about this winsome little maiden which he found it impossible to resist.

"As I have come here to dine, may I be allowed to sit by your side, Miss Palmer?" he asked.

There was plenty of room for two on the rustic bench she occupied under the willow tree, and gathering up her skirts, she made a place for him.

"Certainly," she replied.

Tom had finished his trap and was watching. He was one of those terrible boys who blurt out

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whatever comes into their minds, no matter what pain or confusion the remark may cause.

"I say," he cried, "you'd better look out, Minnie."

"What for, Tommy?" she asked.

"If my sister Beatrice comes home and catches you flirting with Mr. Beresford there will be an awful row."

Minnie was covered with blushes and bit her lips with vexation at this unfortunate speech, which made her feel very uncomfortable, while its effect upon Charles could not fail to be equally disagreeable.

"I don't know what you mean," she responded.

Mr. Beresford put his hand in his pocket and drew out half-a-crown, which he presented to Tom.

"Run out and buy some birdlime," he exclaimed, "and you will catch all the sparrows in the garden."

"Splendid. I never thought of that. You're a trump," cried Tommy, who went away delighted.

Mr. Beresford turned to Minnie with a light laugh on his handsome face.

"I think that riddance was cheap at the price," he observed, "boys at that age are dreadful, but may I ask if you are guilty of flirting?"

"Really I am not," replied Minnie. "I can answer that question with a clear conscience, because—"

She paused abruptly and sighed deeply.

"Because—" he repeated.

"Well, if you must know the truth, because I have never had the chance. I am an orphan—a poor governess, a dependent, and do not see anybody. You may not believe me, but I assure you that I have never had an affair of the heart."

"You do not know what love is?"

"Only from what I have read in stories," Minnie answered.

Charles regarded her with redoubled interest, for such an innocent character was surely worth studying. Most of the pretty girls he had met were fond of talking about the number of offers they had refused, but here was a girl artless enough to confess that her affections were entirely virginal.

"That does not mean that you would have any objection to love," he exclaimed, "supposing you found some one worthy of your notice?"

"I do not know," Minnie answered. "It seems to me an awkward topic of conversation, Mr. Beresford. I cannot tell how we drifted into it."

"Nor I."

She rose from the seat and said something about domestic duties calling her into the house, but he begged her to stay, and as she still persisted he took her hand to detain her.

"Sir!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Beresford, you must not. This is ridiculous—let me go, please."

"Just one word," he replied. "I have taken a great liking to you. The fact is, I believe in first impressions and sudden inspirations. I am a peculiar fellow that way, and have theories. Say you will meet me to-morrow morning at twelve, about half a mile up the road."

"I can make no promises. You will always find me here."

"But you admit that you are a dependent—and—"

"Let me go, please."

He released her, and she was about to cross the garden towards the house when she was startled by seeing Mr. Hughes and his two daughters in the middle of the lawn watching them. They had entered the garden noiselessly, but how long they had been there she was unable to tell. Confused and ashamed she was ready to sink into the earth with mortification.

Charles Beresford comprehended the situation in a moment, and advanced to meet the ladies, to whom he introduced himself, while Minnie took advantage of the opportunity to enter the house and make her escape from what was a most embarrassing position.

It was easy to see from the indignant ex-

pression of Beatrice's face that she was deeply annoyed at the idea of Mr. Beresford meeting the governess, and being alone with her in the garden. Yet she had sufficient self-command to stifle her resentment, and smilingly greet Mr. Beresford, who was soon chatting gaily about lawn tennis, the pictures in the Academy, the four-in-hand-club and the manifold delights of the London season.

CHAPTER II.

ENVY, HATRED, AND MALICE.

An hour later the girls were upstairs, dressing for dinner. Charles Beresford and Mr. Hughes were in the library, drinking dry sherry and smoking cigarettes.

"Did you ever see such impudence?" exclaimed Beattie. "I saw her distinctly let him take her hand."

"So did I," answered Pauline, "and from the way she looked at him they had evidently been flirting."

"No doubt of it. Just fancy! I could never make so free with a man at first sight; but quiet as she is, it is easy to see that she is an artful, designing creature, and the sooner mamma gets rid of her the better."

"So I think. How does my dress fit in the back?"

"Very nicely, Pauline. Is my hair curled enough in front? I want to make a good impression. What a handsome young man Mr. Beresford is. I had no idea I should like him so much or so soon. His manner is so nice, too. I am sure he is a perfect gentleman, and what he could see in that Minnie passes my comprehension."

"And mine," said Pauline. "Your hair is lovely, dear, you look ravishing. Put the pearl solitaires in your ears and lend me the coral drops."

They had no maid, and consequently assisted each other to dress, Minnie sometimes coming in to help them. On this occasion she did not appear, possibly her ears were burning, and she knew that she was being talked about. When they were putting the finishing touches to their toilettes, Tom knocked at the door and asked to be admitted.

"I say, girls?" he exclaimed, "you will have the table pretty nearly to yourselves."

"How is that?" asked Pauline.

"The governor says I'm to dine in the kitchen, and ma has sent word up to Miss Palmer that her presence is not desirable, and she can have her dinner sent upstairs."

"I'm so glad," cried Beattie; "a governess has no business in a drawing-room."

"So am I," said Pauline. "It is quite time ma made her know her place. I like Minnie, but she must not think she is as good as we are."

"Didn't she go on with Mr. Beresford?" remarked Tom. "He had not been in the garden five minutes before she made room on the seat for him."

"Of course. It was her artfulness," replied Beattie. "She had heard us talking about how nice he was and how rich, so she thought he would be a good catch."

"No fear of that," observed Pauline. "He would never prefer her baby face to your commanding style of beauty."

"I trust not; but at the same time I would not give her the chance to exercise her wiles upon him. These poor girls work on a man's sympathy, and we all know that pity is akin to love."

After a few more remarks, Tom went away to the lower regions to see how the new cook was progressing with his preparations for dinner, and to snap up any unconsidered trifles in the shape of nuts or oranges which might be unregarded. Presently Miss Palmer made her appearance, looking flushed; her eyes were red as if with weeping.

"Can I render you any assistance?" she asked, timidly.

"You might have done so half an hour ago,"

replied Beatrice, almost readily; "but we have dressed ourselves, thank you."

"I am very sorry; I did not know it was so late."

"Don't trouble yourself."

Minnie wore her day dress, and had made no preparation for the evening, as Mrs. Hughes's message had intimated clearly that her presence was undesirable. It was a plain cashmere trimmed with black silk, but it made her look quite as attractive as Beatrice Hughes did in her rich, long-trained velvet.

In a short time the bell rang, and the sisters descended the stairs to meet Mr. Beresford once more in the drawing-room. Beatrice felt happier since she had snubbed Minnie Palmer. She knew she looked beautiful that night, and a consciousness of being well dressed added to her serenity.

It was intended that she should make a conquest of her father's guest, and she determined to use all the feminine arts of which she was possessed to do so. Pauline was not jealous of her sister. She had been taught that it was only fair the eldest should go on first, and at her age she felt that she would have plenty of chances.

"I wonder how Minnie feels," whispered Beatrice, spitefully. "Hateful thing, I hope she will cry her eyes out. Let us go in the room with our arms round one another's waists like that picture we saw of the Graces."

Pauline nodded, and they entered the drawing-room as her sister suggested. The effect was not so pretty as they had anticipated, for Beatrice was tall and inclined to be saucy, while Pauline was short and plump. Mr. Beresford was admiring a water-colour sketch which was on the table, and as the girls made their appearance he was saying:

"Charming. I am a connoisseur in pictures, and have quite a collection in my rooms. Ah, Miss Hughes, this is one of your effects, I apprehend."

It was a landscape, a green lane, a hay cart, haymakers in a meadow, a silvery stream in the distance, cows drinking, buttercups and daisies, and overhead blue fleecy clouds. Simple as it was, it displayed decided talent, but Beatrice Hughes did not seem pleased at his allusion to it.

"No, it is not mine," she replied; "our governess did it. I don't think much of it."

"Indeed, you are wrong to say that," continued Mr. Beresford, looking at it again more closely. "Any one who can paint like this ought to make a name."

He turned away from it, for his innate sense of delicacy made him feel that the subject was an unpleasant one, and his eye fell upon an elaborate piece of worsted work which was spread over the sofa.

"Perhaps you occupy your leisure moments in this sort of thing," he observed. "It is beautifully executed. I gave ten guineas the other day for something greatly inferior."

"I do not care about working," answered Beatrice. "Miss Palmer does things like that, and I believe sells them to the Berlin wool shops. She made this one a present to mamma."

Mr. Beresford could scarcely conceal a smile, but he was deeply gratified to find that Minnie was so clever.

"Miss Palmer," he exclaimed, "seems to be a paragon. I must compliment her when she comes down."

Mrs. Hughes had been fidgeting uneasily on the sofa during this conversation. She had purposely kept Minnie out of the way, so that she might not in any way interfere with her daughter, and yet she had become the topic of conversation.

"Miss Palmer has bad headache," she remarked. "I am sorry that she will not be able to join us at dinner to-day."

The extemporised footman at this juncture announced dinner, and Mr. Beresford offered his arm to Beatrice, whom he led into the room. This room was gorgeous with flowers and a display of plates, most of which had been borrowed, like the footman, for the occasion.

It is needless to say anything about the dinner, which was of the usual stereotyped kind, and long before Charles got to the weary end, he thought he would rather have had a chop and a potato at his club. After dinner he had to sit with Mr. Hughes for an hour and talk politics, which bored him. The subject changed to one of local interests, as Mr. Hughes was a vestryman of the parish, and if there is one nuisance greater than another, it is to hear a member of the vestry descant on the merits of the Education Bill, the working of the School Board, and the rate in aid of the Metropolitan Main Drainage Act, with an occasional diatribe against the increase in poor rates and the inadequate nature of the London Water Supply.

When we add that the port wine was bad and the claret worse, it will be easily understood that Charles felt relieved at the entrance of the borrowed footman with the coffee, which was a prelude to an adjournment to the drawing-room, where the ladies were awaiting their arrival.

Charles had been to many parties in suburban houses, and he knew very well what was in store for him. He would have for at least three mortal hours to indulge in small talk of the smallest possible description, listen to indifferent singing and worse playing, turn over the leaves of the music and applaud rapturously at the conclusion of a set and practised piece.

Beatrice exerted herself to the utmost, and tried to be fascinating. It was of no avail. Mr. Beresford did not respond to her advances. He was all the time looking towards the door and wondering if he should see Minnie. He did not know that she had been forbidden to come into the room.

For him the imaginary headache was real, and in his heart he pitied her as the victim of indisposition, not of persecution. At about eleven o'clock he rose to take his leave, and was pressed to come down again whenever he liked.

"Don't stand upon ceremony, Mr. Beresford," said Mrs. Hughes. "We look upon you as a friend of the family now."

"Certainly!" exclaimed the lawyer. "There will always be a knife and fork at our table for you."

Charles thanked them and promised that they should see him again before long, and his brougham being at the door, he stepped in and was driven away. When Beatrice and Pauline were retiring that night they spoke in rapturous terms of their new acquaintance. He was so gentlemanly, so handsome, and came upon them as a revelation, for they had never met anyone like him before.

Beatrice flattered herself that she had made an impression upon him, because he had complimented her upon her singing, and made use of a few conventional phrases which she thought indicated that he liked her.

In reality she had not impressed him any more than a statue of stone in the British Museum would have done. He thought of no one but Minnie Palmer and determined to keep the appointment he had made when they were interrupted in the garden. It is true that she had not agreed to meet him, yet he fancied that she might think enough of him to come.

It was a cold, wet, miserable morning. The weather had changed in the night as it so often does in this climate of ours, and when Charles Beresford stepped out of his brougham and walked up the Kilburn Road, he scarcely expected to see Minnie.

There were very few people about. Those who ventured abroad walked and sheltered themselves under their umbrellas, for the rain came down in a steady, remorseless downpour. The clock of a neighbouring church struck the hour of twelve, and Charles stood still watching. Suddenly a young lady came out of a shop. It was Minnie Palmer. They met face to face.

"I am so pleased," he exclaimed. "So thankful. I scarcely ventured to hope that you would remember what I said yesterday."

Minnie looked frightened and worried. She did not extend her hand. In fact, she seemed anxious to get away from him.

"Indeed, Mr. Beresford," she said, "I did not come here to meet you—I went out to execute a little commission for Mrs. Hughes. I have been quite worried and I did not recollect."

"No matter," he replied, "since we have met I hope there is no harm in my talking to you."

"Please make haste then. If we were seen together and Mrs. Hughes heard of it I should lose my situation."

"Indeed, what for?"

"I was not allowed to come down to dinner yesterday because I met you in the garden."

"They said you had a bad headache," remarked Charles, who began to feel angry with the Hughes family.

"That is true, but they gave it me by their treatment."

"I do not understand this," said Charles, stroking his moustache.

"If I explain it do not think me uncharitable," said Minnie, artlessly. "You are rich, young, handsome—don't think I want to flatter you—they are comparatively poor, a great display was made in your honour yesterday—they have a daughter to marry."

Charles knocked the ash off his cigar and laughed as if much amused.

"This is something new," he answered.

"When I was a poor barrister I noticed that mammas kept their marriageable daughters away from me. Which girl does Mrs. Hughes wish to dispose of?"

"Beatrice, of course."

"Oh! the tall one with the neck like a swan and the pale face like a plaster of Paris cast—no, thank you."

"You are complimentary," said Minnie, adding, "Good-day, Mr. Beresford, I really must go."

"Nonsense," he exclaimed, "there are plenty of other places. If you leave Mrs. Hughes you need not be out of employment."

"They will not give me a character. You do not know what it is to be so poor and dependent. Good-bye."

"Minnie—Palmer—"

He seized her hand as he had done on the previous day, and it is impossible to say what he might have uttered had not a boy come along crying:

"Oh, my! won't I tell ma!"

It was Tommy who had been to buy some sweetstuff and had come across the two at the very time when they wished him ten thousand miles away. Mr. Beresford raised his foot and would have given him a kick, but Tommy was too quick for him. Minnie succeeded in releasing her hand from Mr. Beresford's grasp, and without another word hurried after Tommy, leaving Charles looking after her in a bewildered manner.

"Confound it," he muttered, "just like my luck."

Seeing that it was useless to follow her, he got into his brougham and drove back to town, more deeply enamoured than ever of the pretty governess. Meanwhile Tommy has hastened home ahead of Minnie, bursting with importance, for he had news to communicate which he knew would interest his mother and sisters. He was not a bad boy, and, in fact, he liked Minnie, but he could not keep a secret. When he rushed into the drawing-room Pauline was practising, while his mother and Beatrice were playing chess.

"Oh, you naughty boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Hughes. "How dare you go out? you are all dripping wet and will catch your death of cold. Go upstairs and change your clothes at once."

"I shan't hurt," replied Tommy, "I'm not sugar nor yet salt."

"Go upstairs or I'll tell your father."

"A lot I care," Tom said, putting his hands in his pockets. "Look here, what will you give me if I tell you something about Minnie?"

Mrs. Hughes was intent on the game, and, moving her queen, said:

"Check."

"Never mind the game for a moment, mamma. I'll give it you, for I can see at a glance it is checkmate," replied Beatrice.

"That's just what I think," exclaimed Tommy, with a chuckle. "If you keep that girl in the house you may say good-bye to Beresford."

"Oh, you horrid boy!" cried Beatrice, "what on earth do you mean?"

"Give me a shilling and I'll tell you."

Beatrice produced her purse and handed him what he required, which he pocketed with infinite satisfaction.

"Mr. Beresford was up the road talking to Minnie Palmer, when I came by he had got her hand in his, and if he wasn't making love I know nothing about it," said he.

"Love! what does a boy of your age know about love?" said Mrs. Hughes. "Still this is serious. I really think we ought to dismiss Minnie."

Beatrice was half choked with rage; she had fancied that she had made an impression on Mr. Beresford, and to hear that he had met Minnie clandestinely was more than she could bear.

"If you don't send her away, mamma, I will. She is wicked and designing. It is useless for papa to ask anyone down here as long as she is in the house."

"Leave her to me, my dear. I think I know my duty in a case like this," Mrs. Hughes answered.

At this juncture Minnie Palmer entered the room and placed a parcel on the table.

"These were all the artificial flowers I could get," she exclaimed.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Hughes, with a sneer. "Perhaps you were so agreeably occupied that you had not time to go far in search of them."

Minnie gasped as if for breath, and choked back a sob, while she became deathly white.

"I expected this," she replied; "my presence is no longer welcome in this house. I am the victim of circumstances, and I feel that no explanation I can make will clear me in your eyes."

"If you can explain why you met Mr. Beresford by appointment this morning, I shall be glad to hear you."

"It was entirely accidental."

"Bah!" cried Mrs. Hughes, "I am not a child to believe such a story as that."

"I did not expect you to believe me, and that was why I tendered my resignation. I will leave your house, Mrs. Hughes, at once, and I beg to thank you for all your kindness to me since I have been a sojourner under your roof."

"The sooner you go the better," exclaimed Beatrice.

"Thank you. It is only what I expected from you," replied Minnie.

"Don't be insolent."

"I am not aware that one can be insolent to one's inferiors," Minnie retorted, and having relieved her mind by this speech, she went upstairs to pack her box, having done which she sent the servant for a cab.

Neither Mrs. Hughes nor her daughters had the civility to wish her good-bye, nor was the money due to her tendered.

"Let her send for it, or come and fetch it," was Beatrice's remark when the subject was mentioned.

They looked through the window as she entered the cab, saw the driver put her boxes on the top, and were infinitely relieved when she drove away. Where she had gone they neither knew nor cared. What was it to them that the poor girl was thrown on the world and had to struggle with the tide?

She had committed the unpardonable offence of being admired by a man, and they could neither pity nor forgive her. Two days elapsed after this, before Mr. Beresford again visited Virginia House, and when he did he was received smilingly by the mother and daughters.

"You will stay to dinner?" exclaimed Mrs. Hughes.

"I am not quite sure," he replied, looking at his watch.

"Papa would never forgive us if we let you go," chimed in Beatrice. "He spoke of you as his best client, and, besides, he likes you as a friend, which I am sure we all do."

"Where is Miss Palmer?" asked Charles, somewhat abstractedly.

"The governess!" said Mrs. Hughes. "Oh, she put on so many airs I had to send her away."

"Do you know where she has gone?"

"Indeed I do not. I bundled her out at a moment's notice and have not the remotest idea what has become of her."

Charles Beresford sank into a chair, and his face became the colour of ashes.

"My darling's gone," he cried.

At this exclamation the ladies regarded him with unmixed surprise, and Beatrice nearly fainted away. She was only restrained from doing so by the fear that Mr. Beresford would not pay her the attention which she deemed necessary under the circumstances.

"If I had known that you took such an interest in the young person," remarked Mrs. Hughes, "I would have asked for her address."

"I wish you had," replied Charles.

"Possibly you can find her, if you want to," retorted Mrs. Hughes, angrily.

Charles Beresford felt very uncomfortable. He scarcely knew what to say or do. His whole heart was set upon Minnie. Rising from his chair he apologised to the ladies for being obliged to go away, as he had an engagement in town which he could not neglect. They bowed stiffly, and he left the room without shaking hands with any of them.

The remark he had made, 'My darling's gone!' had thoroughly estranged all their sympathies from him. If he had the bad taste to fall in love with the despised governess when he ought to have become enamoured of the eldest daughter, what could they think of him?

"What do you think of that, mamma?" asked Beatrice, when his carriage had driven away.

"I don't know what to think, my dear," replied Mrs. Hughes.

"I say it's shameful. Fancy that artful little puss winning him in that way."

"Men are fools," exclaimed Mrs. Hughes. "But it is a warning to me. I will have no more pretty governesses in the house."

"Call her pretty?" cried Beatrice.

"Well, I don't know," replied her mother. "There must be something in her face, or she would not have fascinated Mr. Beresford. Never mind, there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

But Beatrice was not to be comforted. She was deeply chagrined at having lost all chance of marrying a hundred thousand a year and a handsome man into the bargain. Sinking back in her chair, she burst into tears, and the remarks she made to her sister about Minnie were not at all complimentary.

CHAPTER III.

LOST AND FOUND.

THOSE words echoed and re-echoed in Charles Beresford's heart as he was whirled rapidly back to London. He felt that he had but one object in life now, and that was to find out where Minnie had hidden herself and her sorrow. For the Hughes family he had nothing but despisal and contempt. They had treated her harshly, unkindly, cruelly, and he could never forgive them for it.

Minnie's sweet face haunted him. He had never been in love before, and he felt the passion all the more acutely for that reason. In the little garden at Kilburn he had met his fate. It was useless to struggle against it. Find Miss Palmer he must, or he would never know peace of mind and happiness again.

He pictured her to himself all alone in some obscure lodging eking out her slender means and looking for work which would not come, for he knew how hard it is for women to obtain a livelihood in the great metropolis. Perhaps she gave French or music lessons to

stupid pupils for a few shillings a day, and was in want of the necessaries of life.

This thought maddened him. He was rich—so rich that money palled upon him; he did not know what to do with it, and he longed—oh, so ardently—to find this poor girl and throw himself and his fortune at her feet. It would be an hourly pleasure to love her, and to buy her all the pretty things in the shape of dresses and jewellery which give a charm to a woman's life.

He advertised in the papers and employed private detectives to trace her, spending large sums in this endeavour, but without success. Days and weeks passed, and he could glean no intelligence respecting her, until at last he grew sick at heart, thinking that she was lost to him for ever.

"My darling's gone!"

Many a time he uttered these doleful words with a deep sigh and an inward groan. His heart was full of grief. He lost his appetite, growing thin and wan; he found no pleasure in the society of his friends, and grew so morbid at last that he went to various mortuaries in different parts of the city to look at the dead bodies of the "Found drowned" fearing that Minnie might have sought refuge in the river.

One day when he had almost given up hope he was passing a picture shop in Wardour Street, when he saw in the window wonderful pieces of antique furniture, helmets worn by crusaders, morions and casques which graced the barons and knights of the middle ages, rare paintings by old masters, and articles of virtu too numerous to mention.

Amidst all those relics of the past, standing out like an oasis in the sandy desert of the Sahara, was a pretty little water-colour sketch. The subject was simple enough. Merely a man meeting a girl in a shady lane. That was all. There was nothing particularly striking in it, yet it fascinated Charles in a strange manner, for the man in the picture was exactly like himself.

He knew what he was like, because he saw himself every morning in the glass, and he had been photographed over and over again. He stood and stared at this picture for more than five minutes. The artist could not have painted him by chance; that was impossible. The thing must have been done designedly. A man, who from his physiognomy was decidedly of the Hebrew persuasion, was standing at the door, and seeing Beresford's concentrated gaze, he fancied that he had got a customer.

"Want to buy that picture, sir?" he exclaimed.

"I shall you it cheap."

"What do you ask for it?" inquired Charles.

"Vat you say to three guineas? It fetch more than that at auction."

"Who is the artist?"

The dealer shrugged his shoulders as he answered:

"She is very clever, but not yet known. All her fault is she paints all her men the same. I shay to my wife that she is in love with some fellow whom she have always in her mind."

"I will buy that picture at your own price," said Beresford. "Do you happen to know the address of the artist?"

"No, but she will be coming here soon with another picture. I generally have one a week. This is her day, and if you vant shome more, I get them for you."

"I will wait and see her."

Charles stepped into the shop and sat down on one of the rectangular, uncomfortable chairs which seem to have delighted our forefathers, but which would not now be tolerated in a suburban cottage. The dealer wrapped the picture up in paper, received its price, and looked out for fresh customers.

Nearly half-an-hour Charles lingered in the shop, when his patience was rewarded by seeing her he sought enter. He knew it would be so. His faithful heart had told him to wait and he should be rewarded. A girl, looking pale and wan, neatly but poorly dressed, entered, with a small parcel under her arm. It was another picture which the needy artist had brought to sell.

"Minnie!" cried Mr. Beresford, starting up.

The girl gave one startled cry and staggered as if she would have fallen, but his strong arm was round her in a moment.

"Charles!" she gasped.

"My darling! Thank Heaven I have found you at last. Many weeks have I watched and waited. It was not chance that brought me here. I feel that it was fate, and we must never be separated again."

"I have been so wretched," she moaned.

"And I have been equally miserable. Why did you not communicate with me? My name was in the Directory."

"They would have said cruel, unkind things about me. It was because I met you in the road that the Hughes's drove me out of the house. They wanted you to marry Beatrice. Why did you not do it?"

Charles Beresford snapped his fingers in the air.

"Shall I tell you why?" he answered. "Because I do not care a rush for Beatrice. You and you only shall be my little wife, and I am very much mistaken if you will refuse me."

"Oh, Charles!" said Minnie, leaning her head upon his shoulder, while she sobbed as if her heart would break.

But it was not with sorrow now, it was with joy, for she knew that Charles's heart beat for her alone, and hers was responsive to his. If he had fallen in love with her at first sight, so had she with him. The affection was mutual, and she was quite overcome at their unexpected meeting.

The picture-dealer looked on sympathetically, for he comprehended that two lovers had met, and he decently refrained from interfering with them. When Minnie became calmer, she informed Charles that she was lodging in a street near Regent Circus, and that she occupied her time in painting, by which means she contrived to get enough to live upon.

Charles insisted upon taking her to the house of his aunt, who lived in Belgravia, and before they quitted the shop she had murmured a faint assent to be his wife. A cab was quickly procured. They went at once to Mrs. Beresford's house, and Charles introduced Minnie as his intended; the lady liked her at once. She kissed her tenderly, listened to the story of her sufferings and trials, and applauded her nephew for selecting so sweet a girl for his wife.

"I know the strong affection of which you are capable," she exclaimed, "and if she loves you as you love her, you will be very happy."

"He is more to me than my life," said Minnie.

Charles Beresford drew her to him, and imprinting a kiss upon her lips, replied:

"We are one until death parts us."

Aunt Beresford lifted up her hands, and with a pleasant smile said:

"Bless you, my children."

It was a pretty picture, and on it we draw the curtain.

B. H.

HENRY LOSSING'S REFORMATION.

SOME years ago I entered the service of a railway company. Among the first acquaintances there formed by me was that of Henry Lossing—I do not give his real name for reasons that will appear in the sequel—an engine-driver in the service of the company. I had obtained board with the family where Lossing resided, and my seat at table was by the side of his own. From the moment of my introduction to the family he seemed to manifest an unusual interest in my behalf, and, finding I was an entire stranger in the place, he kindly remarked:

"I must look out for you a little, young man, for I remember the day when I first left home to seek my fortune, and how I longed for and would have prized one kind friend then."

There was that about my new friend that at once won my confidence, and very soon our ac-

quaintance ripened into an intimacy and attachment that have continued from that day to this, growing still stronger, if possible, as the years roll by.

It was then the practice, if not universally, at least to a great extent, among engine-drivers, as well as men in other pursuits and professions, to indulge, more or less, in the use of intoxicating liquors; and so that a man did not descend into gross inebriety, he was, perhaps, none the less esteemed that occasionally he indulged in a convivial glass.

Under these circumstances, it followed that when I sometimes found Lossing not a little affected by drink, though it was to me a source of regret, yet it did not strike me with that degree of grief and apprehension it might have done under a different state of society and public opinion, more especially as his genial good-nature seemed, at such times, to be augmented, and also that his fault had this extenuation: he had never been seen thus affected while on duty.

As we became more intimate, there grew up between us an attachment often found wanting even where ties of consanguinity exist. Lossing became to me like an elder brother, and in his firm friendship and truthful nature I soon learned to confidently trust. This confidence and trust mutually existed between us, and I believe he had no secret thought or purpose he did not acquaint me with.

One evening he confided to me the fact that he was and had been for some time engaged to be married to a young lady in the village, and that he was commissioned by her to invite me to accompany him in a call upon her. I must confess that when my friend announced to me this fact, and that, too, in a manner that at once conveyed a proof of his own great happiness, although I ought to have been able to congratulate him I could not do so, and was more grieved than rejoiced; for I could not be reconciled to the thought that some one else should hold so important a place in his heart as I knew the lady must whom Harry Lossing would so honour as to make his wife.

Therefore it was with mingled feelings of curiosity, displeasure, and doubt that I accompanied him, in compliance with his request, to see the lady who had so captivated my friend; displeasure that such had been the case—doubts of any excellence on her part that could make her worthy of him.

Under these circumstances it may well be imagined that it could have been no ordinary woman to whom my friend introduced me when I state the fact that no sooner had my eyes rested upon her as she entered the room into which we had been shown than the ungenerous feelings of displeasure I had indulged in at once gave way to admiration; and when, as Lossing presented me, she extended her hand, and in a voice as sweet as the music of silver bells, and with look and manner that evinced unfeigned pleasure, expressed her happiness in the opportunity of forming the acquaintance of any friend of Henry's, and more especially one whom he seemed to esteem so highly and of whom she had so often heard him speak, all my ungenerous doubts and sentiments of displeasure were swept completely away, and in their place I felt at once joy and pride that my friend had been blessed in the love of the noble woman I saw before me, and who I now instinctively felt assured was worthy of him.

It were useless—indeed, it would be impossible—for me to give cogent reasons for this sudden change in my feelings towards the affianced wife of Henry Lossing. There are persons in the world into whose presence it is only needful to come to be at once impressed—nay, assured, not only of their superior excellence, but that we are, as it were, in an atmosphere emanating from a nature higher, purer than our own; and by some occult quality of that nature there is imparted to our inner sense a conviction of moral worth, innate excellence and blessed purity, before which our own souls bow in acknowledgment and worship, ere yet we can give form to the conviction possessing us.

Such was the conviction of my heart as Mary Flemming took my hand, and by act and look confirmed the kindly sentiments her words conveyed. And these impressions, thus implanted on my first introduction to Miss Flemming, were more deeply confirmed as, inviting us to seats, she at once led the conversation to interesting themes and topics, yet with such retiring modesty and gentle unobtrusiveness that she seemed more a listener than a participant in the interchange of thought and sentiment; yet, amid all this retiring grace and gentle, quiet ease, shone out a mind enlightened, purified and exalted—natural faculties of a high order intensified and strengthened by observation and study.

Added to all this grace of mind was the charm of exceeding personal beauty; and it was no wonder to me now that my friend should be a happy and devoted votary at the shrine of such a divinity. Among different topics, the conversation had been directed to that of the formation and the power of evil habits.

Just how this subject had been introduced I could not tell, but from what happened I afterwards became persuaded that it had been with design on Miss Flemming's part. Lossing had expressed the opinion that it was only over weaker minds, or those unsupported by fixed principles, an inherent love of right, and the incapacity to discover where evil commenced and goodness ceased, that the power of habit could obtain mastery.

"If that is the fact," said Miss Flemming, and her voice had a tremulous accent in it, and her eyes, although looking full at Lossing, seemed to regard him with sad tenderness, as though she feared that what she was about to say would touch the sensitive nature of her lover, "and if the opinion you have expressed is correct, then you and your friend here, and even I, must make the sad admission that you are not supported by those fixed principles of which you speak."

Language is inadequate to express the picture of surprise and astonishment Henry Lossing appeared as he realised the full import of these words. For a moment he regarded the speaker with a look of incredulity, as though doubtful if he had heard aright; but as the conviction forced itself upon him that Miss Flemming had not only uttered the words he had heard, but that it was in sober earnestness she had spoken them, pallor overspread his face and his hand trembled visibly as he swept it across his brow, as though to drive away some dreadful oppression. Recovering somewhat from his confusion and astonishment, Lossing, in a voice but little varying from its usual calm and collected tone, and evincing but little the agitation of his mind, said:

"You are severe, to say the least, Miss Flemming, and I sincerely hope I have not given you reason to think so poorly of me and my principles as your words would imply. I hope I have misinterpreted your meaning."

"Do not, Henry, deem me severe, for, believe me, I speak in all kindness—yes, in the presence of your friend here I acknowledge it—in all love for you; indeed, it is only my regard for you that leads me to speak thus plainly. You have not misinterpreted my meaning."

"But I cannot understand! Pray, tell me what it is I have done—of what have I been guilty?"

"Henry, is it possible that I must point out more explicitly the great fault in your character—the greatest I have discovered in you?"

"Doubtless my faults are numerous enough, and if I am to experience as much distress and alarm over each one as you have given me over this, whatever it may be, I think that will be ample atonement for them."

"It certainly was not my desire to wound your feelings; but I could not, in justice to you and myself, remain silent when I saw you yielding to a habit—shall I not call it a vice?—that not only casts reproach upon the noble faculties with which God has endowed you, but wounds—most deeply wounds—the heart that loves you!"

As she said this, the gathering moisture in

her eyes and the quiver of her lips told more plainly than words could have done how sorely indeed her heart was grieved by the fault to which she would awaken her lover's perception. These tokens Lossing was quick to perceive; the effect was to show him that it was no trivial matter that weighed upon the heart of his affianced, and in a voice partaking of both anxiety and reproach he cried—

"In Heaven's name, Mary, tell me at once what this dreadful fault—or crime—is, and let me fully know how vile I am, and how unworthy your regard!"

"I have not deserved such cruel words from you; but even these do not humiliate me as did your appearance last Tuesday, at the fête, when you staggered by intoxicated; and instead of feeling pleasure at your presence I was compelled to turn away in shame and confusion, fearing to have you recognize me!"

"Oh, then this is the dreadful thing that has so distressed you, and which you have magnified almost into a crime! How much you have relieved my mind by this statement of my imprudence! I certainly was not aware that you were present at the fête, or that you intended to visit it; and I been, I assure you I should have taken care not to so far forget myself as to do anything to make you blush for me."

"Oh, Henry, is it possible that you only regard this dreadful habit, which I have reason to fear is gaining more and more dominion over you, in the light of an imprudence merely, and that you have the heart to tell me that, because you did not anticipate my presence, you could do that which would make you ashamed to look your poor Mary in the face?"

"Why, child, you are putting altogether too serious a construction upon the matter. I own I was at that time somewhat affected in the manner you state, and I regret it should have occurred; but I met that morning many friends, especially my associates on the line, whose invitations I could not without rudeness decline; and, furthermore, it is a fact that a drop, as it were, will often affect me in a greater degree than much larger quantities will other men."

"And knowing that, why do you take that drop?"

"What would you have me do? You know it is the common custom among all classes, and you do not desire me to render myself a singular and remarkable character among those with whom I associate, and perhaps lose the good-will and friendship of many by appearing to set myself up as a director of public opinion in this matter?"

"If, Henry, to abstain firmly and for ever from the use of intoxicating drinks will lead the world to look upon you as a singular and remarkable character, then, indeed, is it to be desired that such may be the light in which it shall view you; and as to the loss of the good-will and friendship of those who might disapprove of your course, in my opinion such loss would be gain; and I know you would far rather possess the consciousness of well-doing than the approval of the whole world in any pernicious habit or indulgence."

"You are over anxious and give too much importance to a trifle."

"I can never think anything a trifle that makes you so unlike yourself. Habit grows so strong upon us without our knowledge."

"To those who have not strength of will or the ability to boldly grasp and crush temptation—to hold command over their passions and appetites—to such your kindly admonitions might be useful. But you would not do me the discredit to consider me as one of those? I assure you that when I shall so far lose my self-control as not to be able, in a moment, to break the slight hold any habit shall have upon me, I shall have lost also my own identity, my own self-respect, and, what is still more impossible, the respect, the love I bear you."

"That you love me, Henry, I am sure; and I confess that it will be the delight of my heart to return that love, and make myself worthy of you, if you will only break off that one habit which you claim you have the power to do so readily."

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"Why, what a persistent woman you are. I could find it in my heart to abandon drinking altogether because of my love for you; but, in doing so, I shall not attempt to hide from you the fact that my reason and judgment do not confirm the promise."

"Then, Henry, of how little worth would that promise be? No, I want your reason and judgment to be convinced, for I know your character and temperament are such that once these faculties of the mind are led to a perception of the truth, neither the loss of the good-will of associates nor the fear of being accounted singular will prevent you from embracing that truth and guiding your course by its light. But will you listen to a story I have to tell you on this subject?"

"Certainly, Mary."

"Last summer, when I was visiting in a remote part of the country, it was my good fortune to snatch a poor old woman, known as 'Crazy Nan,' from under the wheels of a heavy cart. She was struck heavily on the shoulder, and was faint with pain and terror. Making her lean upon me, I conducted her to my uncle's house. It was about the hour when my aunt took her usual siesta, and uncle being absent on business, and the domestics being in some other part of the house or grounds, I saw no one as we entered. Leading her to a seat, I thought some wine would revive her, and, going to the side-board, poured out a glass and offered it to her. Never shall I forget the venom with which she dashed it from my hand to the floor, and how her eyes flashed, as with fire, upon me.

"'Would you murder me?' she cried. 'You have just saved my life, and now would you poison me and destroy it?'

"After a little time had passed, and she had grown more calm, she bade me come and sit beside her, and then, rocking her body backward and forward, and fixing her eyes on me, she said:

"'You have, young lady, done a Christian act in saving my poor life, and I owe you an apology for the rude manner in which I rejected your proffered kindness just now; but I think you will not blame me when I tell you my reasons.'

"'You see me a poor, forlorn, nameless, homeless, half-crazed being. It was not always thus. My father was a man well-to-do in the world, and though not possessing many of the advantages of education, he appreciated its worth, and was liberal in the use of his means to give such to his children.'

"I recall my girlhood's happy home, its sweet, its blessed hours, associated as they are with a father's kindly care, a mother's loving tenderness, a brother's watchful, fond regard; and, oh, when I think they are all gone from me, and of the horrible manner of their deaths, I wonder I, too, did not die, instead of living on to meet still greater sorrow.'

"'My father had from my earliest recollection been addicted to the use of intoxicating drinks, and prided himself not a little on the quality and abundance of the various kinds of liquor always kept on his table, and dispensed to all comers as free as water—ay, and more so. No greater affront could be given him than to refuse to drink upon his invitation; and indeed it was an offence he was rarely called upon to resent, for few men in that day, in the society in which we lived, had any inclination to decline a request of such a nature.'

"I might multiply words in telling you how under these circumstances the thirst for strong drink grew upon him, also upon my brother, and how, gradually, from one stage to another, they both became habitual drunkards. I cannot bear to recite all the details of their downward career, and the sufferings we endured, and my poor mother's grief and sorrow in consequence. Our happy home was no more. All our worldly possessions were squandered.'

"'My father had become a very demon, and in his drunken frenzies our lives were often in jeopardy. My brother had lost all regard for us, and his days and nights were spent in gambling, drinking and rioting; and in a quarrel growing out of a game at cards, he

stabbed his opponent to the heart, killing him on the spot!

"'When his crime and arrest were made known to us my poor mother sank beneath the blow, and on the very day he was executed for murder she died. My wretched father shortly after came to a miserable and horrid death. He was found one morning smothered in a ditch into which he had fallen. Oh, my dear young friend, when I think of these horrible things, is it to be wondered at that I lose both sense and reason?'

"'I pass over my sufferings at that crisis. Suffice it to say that in time I married a man whom I truly loved, and in the joy of loving and being loved forgot what I had suffered. Earth seemed to me a renewed paradise when we took up our abode in the beautiful cottage his thrifit and thoughtful love had provided, and our linked lives began their course together.'

"'No man, I believe, ever possessed a kinder, truer, more faithful heart than did my husband, and no woman, perhaps, was ever more fond. Hence it was that when at times he would come home very much under the influence of liquor—for he was one of your so-called moderate drinkers—it did not in him present the same dreadful aspect it had in those I had lost; and, moreover, at all such times his love and solicitude for me became still more zealous and manifest.'

"'Two years had passed since our marriage—two years of blessed joy and peace—when, as if to make our happiness still more complete, God sent us a little babe. And now, indeed, did my cup of joy seem full and running over. In my husband and child had been given back to me the happiness and the joy I had lost in earlier life, and I felt I was more than recompensed for all I had then suffered.'

"'Thus time flew swiftly on, and my darling girl was nearly three years old; and I never saw one so handsome, knew one so good. She was my joy, my life, my blessing, and in her did my husband's heart seem bound up.'

"'During all this time his habit of indulgence in drink had not diminished; indeed, it had increased; yet his thoughtful care and love for me and his child seemed to burn with still brighter flame. Although as a general thing he maintained the control he had always claimed over indulgence, yet there had been times, though not frequent, within the last two years, when he had returned to me so far inebriated as to render him, for the time at least, incompetent and even oblivious to the duties of home and business.'

"'As I have said, my darling was nearly three years old. It was on the fifth of September, and there had been on that day a barbecue at the little village two miles distant, and my husband had attended. It had been arranged that little Alice and myself should accompany him, but on the morning of that day she had not appeared as well as usual, and I deemed it advisable to remain at home with her; but, as nothing serious was apprehended, I insisted that he should not lose his day of anticipated pleasure. Promising to return early, he departed.'

"'The day wore away and evening came on. My child was asleep in her cradle, and I went to look at her. I found her breathing hard, and her little face was red, and when I put my cheek to her lips her breath was hot and burning. The doctor lived but half a mile away, and feeling somewhat alarmed, I determined to run and tell him her state. I would be absent but a few minutes.'

"'I ran with my utmost speed. I found the doctor at home. He did not detain me long, he said, though it seemed to me an hour. I made my way back with equal speed, but by the time I reached a little elevation, from which our cottage could be seen, the twilight had deepened into gloom, but not so as to entirely shut it out from my view, and I thought I saw a white smoke coming out of it.'

"'With a cry of alarm and supplication I flew forward. I reached the door, which was wide open, and out of it was pouring a dense smoke. Blind with that and terror, I groped my way to the cradle. I found it, despite the stifling, blinding smoke, but when I reached it—oh, Lord of mercy! my child! my darling! my

babe, whose breath I had felt on my cheek but a few moments before, was burnt to a cinder!'

"'When the poor woman had told me her sad story thus far, she remained for a few moments silent, looking straight before her, great sobs from time to time convulsing her frame, but no tears moistened her eyes. Poor woman, her tears were all shed long ago. After a while I ventured to speak, and asked her to tell me further, and of her husband, and her life since that sad night.'

"'My husband!' she cried. 'Oh, young lady, it was he—the father of my child—he who worshipped his darling babe—it was he who destroyed that child and drove me, its mother, to madness! It was a long time before I knew this, for the sight of the dead and charred body of my blessed babe in that moment dethroned my reason, and for months I was mad. But when at length there came intervals, like this I experience at the present moment, when reason, for a little, resume her sway, they told me all.'

"'My husband had returned while I was on my way to the doctor's. He was intoxicated to that degree that others had assisted him to the door, and left him. In his wretched state he had taken the candle and staggered to the cradle, to look at his babe, and dropped the light amid the clothing, and too intoxicated to remove it, or even realise what he had done, sank in beastly stupor on the floor.'

"'My cries and shrieks when I saw my burning babe amid the fire and smoke had arrested the attention of persons passing along the road. They had removed my husband and myself from the burning house, and when, the next day, he awoke from his inebriated state and learned what he had done, and beheld his wife a hopeless maniac, he took a pistol from a cupboard, and before his purpose could be divined, had shot himself through the heart.'

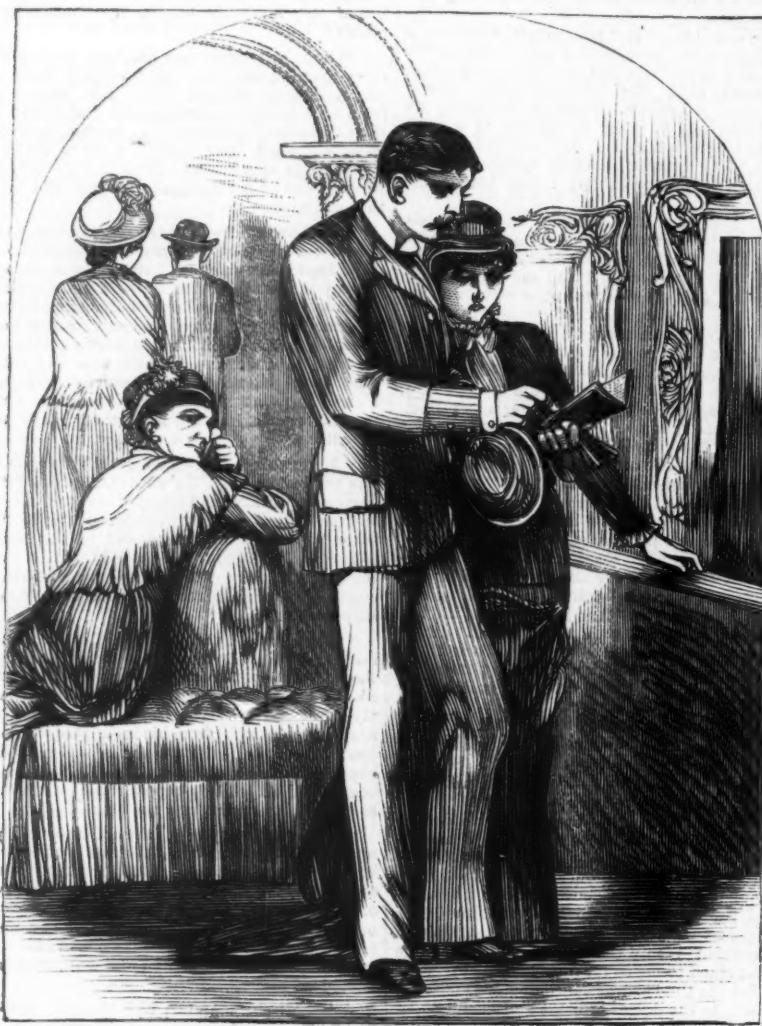
"'And now, my young friend, I have told you my sad history, though it anew wounds my heart to do so. But you have been kind to me, and I would wish to guard you from the rock on which my happiness was wrecked. Trust not the man who drinks! No matter how noble his nature, how kind his heart, how deep his love for you, that accursed habit will, sooner or later, lead him to ruin!'

When Miss Flemming had finished the sad story, she sat for some moments silent. I turned towards Lossing. He was looking straight at his affianced bride, and I saw tears glistening in his eyes and on his cheeks. After a little he arose, and, going to her, said:

"'What you have related has affected me much, and I do not care to conceal the fact. Nine-tenths of the hackneyed and stereotyped arguments generally urged would have no effect on my mind; but the aspect in which you have presented it changes my belief; and now, from this time forth, I break off from the habit that has given you pain, and to this sacred promise, made to you, I now call my friend here to bear testimony. I make this declaration and this promise because my judgment and reason are convinced, and, therefore, you can rest in the faith that will not be broken.'

The promise made that night by Henry Lossing has been ever sacredly kept. In the following spring he and Miss Flemming were married, and for many years he continued his employment in the service of the company, compelling the confidence and esteem of all who knew him. By the practice of prudence and frugality, and aided and blessed in all his endeavours for good by his excellent wife, he was enabled to lay up a goodly sum of money, and a few years since purchased an excellent farm, and, surrounded by every comfort and blessing the heart can desire, both he and his wife esteem it a privilege and one of the pleasures of their lives to welcome any one of that fraternity of which he was, for so many years, an honoured and respected member.

E. H. B.



[WATCHED.]

AN EPISODE.

SHE was a widow and bewitching. I first saw her at the Hotel Belvidere, in Rome. She was a wee thing, dressed all in sombre black, with masses of auburn hair piled on the small head; great, melting, dark eyes, with a child-like look of surprise in them, and sparkling diamond earrings in the dainty ears, clasping the crêpe ruche at the throat, and worn as a guard to the massive wedding-ring.

"They were my husband's gift, and I shall wear them always," she told me once, with a tender drooping at the corners of the rose baby mouth.

They were late for dinner, she and her Gorgon chaperone, and entered the salle-à-manger at one of those interesting and frequently recurring pauses when was effected the inevitable change of plates between each slenderest course. Eyes of all, men, women, and garçons, from the four long tables, were fixed upon the strangers, while the "Apollo of the Belvidere," as we called our magnificently formed head waiter, conducted them to their seats.

She, meaning my pretty widow, timid, shrinking, appealing; her companion, tall, erect, grey-haired, with the peculiar air of dignity which gold-bowed eye-glasses always confer. The young man at my side gave a slight start, and I saw his eyes follow—Apollo, I suppose.

"Ahem! So you are a sheep, too," I said, with one eye on him, the other on the plates of beef, cut in diminutive slices, from which my vis-à-vis was helping himself generously.

"Beg pardon, madam," he said. "Did you speak to me?" with a bewildered look in his eyes.

"I simply remarked (will the man leave no beef for his neighbours?) that you, also, belong to the sheep family, and seem obliged to follow where others lead."

"Does that go to show that I am a mutton head, madam?" with a tolerant smile.

"It means, merely, that you, like all these others, cannot allow two unprotected ladies to enter the public dining-room of an hotel without staring them out of countenance."

"Oh!" was all the answer he vouchsafed, and straightway his eyes travelled back, away across to that fourth table, while I applied myself diligently to the beef, at this moment thrust over my shoulder.

Let me say, just here, that in this story I am nothing. In fact, I am always nothing—being an old maid. The boy by my side—yes, boy! for he could not have been more than twenty-two—was a manly young fellow, but in ways of the world, in ways of women, in ways of love, a very child. He was a great pet of mine; we had grown very good friends in one week, with that intimacy which grows so fast in a foreign city. While they whisked away our plates he turned to me and said:

"Those ladies travelled in the same compart-

ment with me from Genoa to Pisa the other day—let me see—three weeks ago. We had some conversation together—not much, but enough to learn that we had some mutual acquaintance in London. I was guilty of staring because I was surprised to see them, that's all."

"Oh, yes, that's all," I thought. "Very surprising, indeed, almost miraculous, to meet again travelling over the same route with oneself. Much less wonderful if the King of Siam had walked in. In the comparison, that was rather to be expected."

Strange what power there is in melting eyes, bright, soft, and with that innocent baby look in them! While the boy was discussing his orange and I mine (I always took two, else what good of being in Italy?) they passed us again, evidently desirous of leaving the dining-room before the rush.

The Gorgon stalked by, head up, arms not akimbo, but I had almost said so; after her, the timid little creature, whose dress in passing just brushed Edgar Waynor's sleeve. As he looked up, flushed, startled, almost awkward for the instant, she gave him one quick glance, from eyes that almost spoke, in which was only the faintest touch of recognition. He cared nothing for his orange after that, and I (old maidishly) branded her in my own mind—coquette.

When we went into the salons, there are two in that hotel, small ones, opening from each other—they were, as usual, full of people, grouping themselves here, there, everywhere; but the tall woman with her charge, or the widow with her foil—which was it?—were nowhere to be seen. I saw the boy glance hurriedly about, then a look like a cloud fell over the sunniness of his face.

Miss Kennet's singing was powerless to win him to the piano that night, and he could not be induced to join either of the small circles for playing whist (whist, indeed!), for laying out plans for the morrow, or to hold Berlin wool for some pretty hands to make a play of winding. After drifting about restlessly for a little time, he stepped into the hall, took his hat, and went out, defying Roman night air and malarious influences like a man, while I, like an old maid, was cross, and not caring for all those foolish people, started for my room.

Now, getting to one's own room in Rome frequently means, as it did in my case, toiling up three or four long flights of stairs, which is not always easy after a hard day's work sightseeing. As I stopped to pant on the landing I saw two enormous trunks, which were new-comers, I was sure.

"Humph! her paraphernalia of war, I suppose, by aid of which she conquers when she lays siege to the hearts of men and—boys."

And, feeling very self-complacent over my metaphor, which struck me as being not only original but quite poetical as well, I journeyed on. I was wholly mistaken, as most folks generally are; I learned afterwards that the obnoxious she travelled very simply, with all her worldly goods stowed away within the bounds of a hat box.

I was in Rome to see what can be seen in no other city, and I was that unmitigated bore, an indefatigable sight-seer; so I made no very long affair of my boiled egg and cup of coffee, and having settled my day's plan the night before, trudged off alone, partly from preference, partly from necessity.

After a long morning at St. Peter's I strolled into the Borghese gallery to refresh myself with some of my favourite pictures, for though a most matter-of-fact, hard-tack sort of person, with not the slightest disposition to "gush," I confess to a strong love for, and, so far as it goes, a glimmering appreciation of, the "old masters."

I had been sitting for a long time, resting my hands and feasting my eyes on "Diana," when I heard Edgar's voice speaking earnestly. Life was new to him; he had not yet acquired the fashionable accomplishment of being thoroughly blasé. Yes, I might have known it; she was with him. Petite, pale now, perhaps only look-

ing so by contrast of the long, black, clinging drapery.

It had happened naturally enough. At the entrance there had been some vague misunderstanding through the widow's vague Italian; Edgar arrived at an opportune moment, explained for them, smoothed over the difficulty, and they entered together. Edgar's voice was earnest; her reply was low—so low that he must needs bend his head. But the soft eyes gave another of those magic, fleeting up-looks. Ah, my boy, beware!

"Where's the old woman?" I thought, fiercely, and was so busy looking for that dignified personage that, before I knew it, I was one of the group, and Edgar was introducing to me both the ladies, Miss Yaley and Mrs. Hallston.

Of course I bowed and uttered the usual polite fibs about being most happy to make their acquaintance, and—knew that my afternoon was spoiled. "The heart of man is desperately wicked," we all know, but to think that that honey-eyed boy should have been able to conceive such a plan! From sheer necessity, we two "old uns" were thrown upon each other's graces, while that little black butterfly (if there is no such thing in nature it is not my fault) and my boy strolled off together, pecking a little sweet out of each lovely old painting, but I could see, even so early, more absorbed in each other than in all the works of art combined.

I was thoroughly out of patience; I often am, but, being a gentlewoman, I made an effort for self-control, and tried to be polite to this statuesque person, who was no more chaperone, except in name, than as if she were not having her expenses paid all over Europe to look as though she were playing propriety.

"Ah, I see you have Baedeker, and as I have Murray, we shall get on famously. Having just arrived, of course, this is your first visit to the Borgheze?"

She stood there, tall, grey, and unapproachable, I thought, until looking more closely, in surprise at receiving no reply, I saw that the mouth was a trifle tremulous, and in the small eyes was a look almost pitiful. Just then she said, in very low tones, still unaware that I had spoken:

"I am very deaf; I hear scarcely anything. Do not trouble yourself to talk, for it would be useless."

I hurriedly scribbled on my Murray:

"Very well; we will be dumb companions. Let us 'move on.'"

By this time we had lost sight of those young things (I am sure they had dodged us), and we met in the outer room at the hour for closing the gallery. This was the beginning, and it seemed, before the month was over, that there would never be an end. There were never two poor women more abused, under cover of flattery, than were Miss Yaley and myself. They coaxed and wheedled her to their hearts' content, and I was obliged to humour them to see that everything went right.

What a boy it was, to be sure! So inventive in resources; such charming programmes as he not only laid out but carried out successfully. He always knew the pleasant places to go to, the best things to see at the best times, the most accommodating cabmen to employ. Ah, me! what must he not have spent?

We explored St. Peter's from the "confession" to the top of the glorious dome, and perhaps it was as well for the surcharge of feeling which was making us all sad that poor Miss Yaley should have dropped her eyeglasses over and down, down on to the marble pave beneath. Edgar laughed; all through those days his laugh came so readily, poor boy! Mrs. Hallston looked so sympathetic, Miss Yaley clasped her long hands in despair, and I grunted, as is my wont; but the gold bows were never heard of more.

We attended one of Mr. Forbes' archaeological lectures upon the Roman Forum; imagined, as he described, the appearance of the different pagan temples; heard again, in spirit, the burning words of Mark Antony, as we gazed upon the pile of bricks which once, clothed with

marble, was the rostrum from which never-to-be-forgotten orations were spoken.

We even felt like ancient Romans ourselves as the lecturer stooped and picked up an antique coin. He handed it—a glorious souvenir—to Mrs. Hallston. Natural, no doubt, she being the prettiest woman in the party; but I sniffed. I really felt that I should have had it; I was the oldest. Miss Yaley looked injured; was she not deaf?

Mrs. Hallston's eyes spoke her thanks, and Edgar's face beamed. What was the matter with the boy? To be so infatuated with a widow just on account of her great brown eyes and long black gown. I could see nothing else at all striking about her. I knew, though, that her soft, coquettish glances and helpless ways were taking the boy's fancy—heart, too, I feared—captive.

The poor little widow was so sensitive. Once, after an outburst from me, she had shrunk away and turned towards Edgar appealingly, as a frightened child might turn to a sure friend. It looked involuntary, but I was prone to distrust looks.

The warm blood bathed the boy's face, and half unconsciously he stretched out his arm protectingly, then shamefacedly dropped it, and hurried on to look at some noted fresco. I shut my lips all the harder after that, and never said a word when she pitied the "halt and maimed and blind" on every street corner, until Edgar, in sympathy for her tender heart, would lavish all his small change upon them; the consequence being, by a certain free-masonry which exists between them, we were followed by beggarly blessings with the sure accompaniment of beggarly footsteps wherever we went.

They dogged us on the Pincio, where we went to see the people, hear the music and eat ices—very poor ones, too—but I, Mehitable Sheldon, held my peace. The truth was, my heart, which, during my possession of it for forty years had never been troubled on my own account, ached for that boy.

I had liked him from the first time I saw him at the Belvidere table, where his place was always next mine. He was such an honest, happy-eyed, manly boy; rollicking, merry, heartily enjoying his continental holiday, but, with all his jollity, giving one the feeling of deep, underlying strength and strong tenderness, which is the greatest, because peculiar, charm a man can have in the eyes of a woman, young or old.

I was silly enough about him; I used to wonder how his mother could have held following him. Had she so many noble sons that she could let this one go from her across the water, over the "beaten path" of the old world, without a pang?

And now—oh, I could see, and the mother nature in me—old maids have it—cried out against this wrong. That the boy's first knowledge of love should come in this wise, that this woman, with false, melting eyes, this Circe of the black robes, should waken those great heart-throbs of affection, which of right belonged to some pure girl—somewhere, as yet unknown, but whom, nevertheless, this woman was defrauding. Yes, my heart ached, and perhaps that made it easy for me to be silent. The feeling was too deep for temper.

The month for Rome was finished; finally, there was nothing left but to hear Fr. Giovanni sing once more. Miss Yaley opened her mouth and spoke:

"There is just one thing more; we have not yet seen the queen."

True enough, we had been unfortunate. Every evening in the drawing-room people would tell of having seen her majesty; how lovely she looked, how they had been near enough to speak; and "have you not seen her yet?" We had grown quite tired and a little ashamed of replying, "No, not yet."

There seemed to be a fatality about it. We always went out a little too late, or came in a little too early. Once—we never told this—we were shopping in the Corso, and were so absorbed in our purchases that we did not know

that the queen had driven by until we could just descry the scarlet livery of her attendants in the distance.

"I should so love to see her," sighed the widow. "You could manage it, Mr. Baynor?" "I can and most certainly will," replied Edgar, gaily. "We will see her to-morrow, if we have to go to the Quirinal and demand an audience. You would not be willing to leave Rome without a glimpse of the royal lady, Miss Sheldon, I'm sure."

Perversity is my forte. I had long ago resolved to see the queen or die; but my answer was rather discouraging.

"Oh, I don't mind. She is only a woman, after all, 'clothed in a little brief authority.' I don't think much of women."

Oh, my native townspeople, how would ye have rejoiced to hear this heretical acknowledgment from one of your most enthusiastic Women's Rights advocates. Edgar laughed; Miss Yaley was, as usual, dumb; poor thing. Mrs. Hallston smiled that tender, child-like smile which Edgar thought divine and I knew to be supercilious.

"Now whither?" asked Edgar, the following day, as we seated ourselves in the carriage, firm in our resolution not to return until we had seen the fair Marguerita D'Italia.

"She never leaves the palace until four o'clock," quoth I. "We shall have time for a little drive; let us have a peep at the excavations."

We drove to the new part of Rome, as they call it, through the Via Nazionale, around by the railway station, and back again to where men were digging in what were once the baths of Diocletian. What water birds those old Romans used to be, and verily, how are the mighty fallen. Suddenly Edgar exclaimed:

"We have missed the queen. There are the three red men at the other end of the Corso, just entering the Piazza Del Popolo. She must be going to the Villa Borghese."

In one place, where two roads intersect and curve around a wooded hill, a great number of carriages had drawn up in line, awaiting the royal coming. At last, at last! We held our breath. On they came; the proud, high-stepping horses, the quietly elegant carriage, the three statues in red and—the fair lady of Rome, exquisitely dressed, with a pretty rose bloom on her cheeks, and a kindly smile on her lips, bending her dainty head to right and left, the darling of Italy, the tenderly beloved Marguerita.

The sight thrilled me, and I scarcely saw the lady and gentleman who accompanied her; but followed her with long looks of admiration as she was rolled away. We waited, as did all the rest, until the royal carriages had met and passed us several times. The king, with his hat ever in hand, bowed constantly to his devoted subjects on either side, of all grades and conditions, for when the Villa gates are thrown open the poorest peasant child is free to enter.

"Now for one more turn on the Pincio," pleaded Edgar, when we had signified to our charioteer that we were ready again to test the powers of his steed. "We must see the sun set behind St. Peter's once."

"Yes, but not 'for ever and for aye,'" I replied. "This evening we must drink of the waters of the Fontana Frari, that we may surely visit Rome again."

"Is that the tradition? Then we will not fail of a final draught. Shall you not be homesick for Rome, Mrs. Hallston?"

The widow, as usual, looked her reply, but this time spoke too, softly, just above a whisper.

"I love Rome. I wish I need never go away. I shall long for it and—afterward."

I sniffed and grunted, then coughed to hide it. Fury was in my heart. Her acting was perfect. That little catch in the breath and break in the sentence told so well, as it was meant to tell, why Rome would be dear to her. She was ladylike always; never loud, never gushing, only so deeply interested, in her languid way.

Her dress, too, was quiet to severity. Long, black, heavy, clinging, relieved only by the

gleam of the small but exquisite diamonds which she always wore. But her form was perfect, and did she not know that feathers and flutters and much bewilderment of millinery would add no grace to her dainty style? Her role, carried through dress, manner and all, was simplicity, and "simplicity tells in the hands of a woman who is not simple."

In the midst of my study of her and my recognition of the charm which was gaining such rapid influence over the boy, there happened a strange thing. We were slowly ascending the long road from the Piazza Del Popolo to the top of the Pincian hill; preceded and followed by many vehicles of many grades, from the magnificent equipage of Prince Borghese to the shabbiest of the many shabby cabs in Rome. It being nearly five o'clock, very many carriages were passing on our right, on their way from the beautiful pleasure grounds, while crowds of pedestrians were thronging the narrow sidewalk.

I have always loved to be in the midst of people; to study special faces and little unconsidered, characteristic notions, and there was a peculiar fascination for me in this kaleidoscopic view; this catching of striking bits here and there. There was some blocking in front, and we were stopped for a moment.

In the long line of descending carriages was one in which two gentlemen were sitting, one of whom was a dark-browed man with a face grave to sternness. In that one moment it impressed me sadly, from its set expression of listless weariness.

Suddenly, as he glanced carelessly in our direction, his face changed; he started forward, uttering a quick exclamation of surprise; then, the check being removed, we started on a little faster than before. It was the happening of one instant, and we had passed each other.

There was a merry speech from Edgar, who, looking up the hill, had not seen the strange gentleman, interrupted by a groan from Miss Yaley. The widow lay a limp, white burden in her arms; she had fainted. This was genuine, at least.

She came to herself soon, but rested against the elder woman, weak, trembling, her eyes tightly closed, and shuddered once or twice as we were rattled over the pavement, across the Piazza Di Spagna, up the hill to Hotel Belvidere.

Edgar, with a face almost as white as hers, was eager to help her as we alighted; but she clung closely to Miss Yaley, whose slight figure staggered under her weight. Edgar looked at me imploringly. I was standing by, feeling hard hearted, exultant, furious, delighted, and oh! so inexpressibly sorry, all at the same time.

I took her in my arms and almost carried her up the long flights of stairs, and, laying her on her bed, turned without a word and left the room. It required all the self-control of which I was capable not to speak indignant words; but I held them back, just as I had been holding them all the weeks since I first saw her great brown, witching eyes, and knew then as well as afterward that she was fair and false.

How I ever lived through the interminable dinner-hour I marvel to this day. I dressed for it, as usual, and pecked a little at the food which I could scarcely see, but made a fine pretence of eating for Edgar's sake.

I heard the usual clatter all over the room; exchanged bits of talk with my neighbours; smiled in the flesh, I suppose—the spirit was far enough away—at the stereotyped witticisms of a perpetual tourist, whose victim I was, perchance, by his near vicinity; while all the time my heart was aching for the blue-eyed boy who overwhelmingly at first, afterwards more reservedly, plied me with questions.

Tale of martyrs! Arrows and gridirons were nothing to this torture of being bound, hand and foot, by the strong though invisible cords of conventionalism. How I longed to be a Hottentot, or Indian, or a Pompeian relic—anything rather than have to look into that boy's honest face and tell him quietly that it was nothing—over-fatigue, perhaps.

The air of Rome is very debilitating, you know. Sorrento and Capri, oranges and new sights, would soon make her well again. Edgar went out after dinner, ostensibly "to pick up a few little things he did not like to leave Rome without," but really to buy the daintiest crystal basket of fruit; large, golden oranges and pearly white grapes, arranged by deft fingers with the artistic grace which is the breath of life to even the lowliest of the sons and daughters of Italy.

Accompanying it—I learned all this months afterwards—was a lovely bunch of rare and costly flowers, and tucked away, half hidden by their leaves, was the fatal note which told, in a few manly words, the story which his every look and act had betrayed for weeks.

I went to my room, and, shuffling off my long silk dress, which hampered me, threw on my waterproof in lieu of a dressing-gown, which was one of the luxuries which I had left behind me when I had stoically resolved to travel through Italy with next to no luggage.

Denuded of filmy laces, superfluous "ribbons and rings and all pretty things," (with my hair rolled into a tight little knot on the top of my head, I looked what I felt, a determined, indignant, wretched old spinster. All the latent motherhood in my nature was up in arms for this boy whom, six weeks ago, I had never seen.

It frightened me, almost. I paced the room, too excited for calm thought, and it was not until thrice repeated that I became aware of a timid rap on my door. I groaned inwardly at the interruption, then opened the door a hand-breadth—because of my waterproof—and said, in most ungentle tones:

"Well?"

"It is I, Miss Yaley, please," said a low voice.

"Well?" I repeated, more ungracious still.

How deafness defends people, sometimes! Of course she could not answer what she did not hear, and she stood there, showing so evidently that she expected to come in, that I threw the door open and motioned her to enter with the air and gesture of an empress; sadly marred, I fear, by my peculiar and scarcely-to-be-called artistic attire.

I gave her the only chair in the room, and took up my position, with as much dignity as possible, on my trunk. Her first remark, which was made as though she had undertaken a most unpleasant task which she wished to finish speedily, stiffened me into a statue.

"I come to you as Mr. Raynor's friend," she began, quietly. "Things have been all wrong. There have been misapprehensions. I am sorry for him, but Mrs. Hallston is not a widow, as I know now you must have inferred from her dress and—well, her manner. Do us the justice to remember that we never said so. Mrs. Hallston is still a wife—separated, not divorced—from her husband, whom we met this afternoon on the Pincio. The shock overcame her. She did not know that he was in Europe. She came abroad for her health, and—"

How could the woman talk on so like a parrot or a something wound up to speak mechanical words, when I was glaring at her from my trunk, and even the brown and grey knob of hair on top of my head was quivering with rage?

"We shall leave Rome early to-morrow, at five in the morning. It is not worth while to say more, except that we have changed our route. That is all, I believe," and she stepped towards the door.

"No, not quite all," I cried. "Hear me first a little. I have held my peace all along for fear of precipitating what I have been hoping something might happen to prevent, but now, to you, I will speak. How could you, a woman seemingly refined, and old enough to be the mother of that boy—how could you, I say, have looked on all these days at the ways and wiles of that doll-baby, false as she is pretty, and have spoken no word? Been dumb and indifferent while that boy, bright, brave, a true-hearted gentleman—"

I choked and gasped, and she took the opportunity to say:

"Do not excite yourself to no purpose. You forget my infirmity; I have heard nothing."

Then and there, speech being denied me, I, Mehitable Sheldon, took that exasperating, not-to-be-scolded-down woman by the shoulder, and, putting her outside my door, shut it and turned the key; then, still speechless, I poured out the vials of my wrath upon my unoffending wardrobe, squeezing and pressing each article into infinitesimal space, and then—sighed because of no more trunks to pack.

True to the word, they were off early the next morning, and I must speak briefly of what followed. Edgar came to me about ten, with a tiny scrap of a note which had been handed to him by "Apollo," on the tray with his coffee. His look was apprehensive and a little bewildered as he gave me the note to read. It was without date, address or signature, as follows:

"THANKS for the fruit and flowers. Many and more thanks for your kindness of the past weeks. I shall never forget it or forgive myself. We shall have left Rome before you read this note. Miss Sheldon will tell you all I have left unsaid."

My fingers shrank at first from touching the lines her false, cruel hand had penned; but one sentence puzzled me.

Would she, indeed, never forgive herself for wrecking the boy's joyousness? For toying with a true heart's first love, than which there is no tenderer thing, or was it only another of her artistic touches—a suggestive nothing from which much might be inferred?

I told him all, gently as I could—and I hope I may never need to do the like again by any betrayed heart. He was very quiet, my brave boy, but very white. When I finished there was a long pause, then he rose.

"Good-bye," he said. "I shall go to-day." I grasped the hand he extended convulsively. I tried to speak, but the words would not come.

"Good-bye," he said again; and bending his tall head, touched his dry lips to my hand.

I threw my arms around his neck and kissed his forehead—twice.

"As your mother would do if she were here this day, my boy." Then half sobbing, I added:

"Go now;" and he went.

Snow in London is not a pleasant sight, and as I looked out from my breakfast-room windows yesterday morning I groaned in spirit—aloud likewise—to my solitary self at the thought of the not-to-be-postponed expedition down to the very heart of the city. Screwing up my courage, I donned waterproof and overshoes, and, armed with an umbrella, started out to brave the elements.

"Oh, beautiful snow, where are the charms which poets have seen in thy face?" I queried, mentally, as, clutching my petticoats in one hand, while with the other vainly trying to poise my umbrella at the proper angle, I plunged on through one heap after another.

How different this from those sunny, shiny days in Italy. One year ago, I was in Rome. Ah, me, and my thoughts travelled back sadly to the dreary ending of that day on which, after determined and high endeavour, we had locked upon royalty.

I had drifted about a great deal since then. I had climbed Vesuvius; walked all over Pompeii looking for it; shivered and shuddered over the Simplon, adored Mont Blanc, shopped and drove and danced in Paris, strolled about and gazed, with imagination all rife, and now, prosaically enough, I was hurrying down Cheapside, feeling business-like and commonplace.

"Is it possible, my dear Miss Sheldon? To think I should meet you here!"

And in another minute I was shaking hands with Edgar; tall, straight-limbed, honest-eyed as ever, with only a little deeper tone in the happy voice, a softer depth in the merry eyes. We had so many questions to ask and answer

and we were so jostled about by our fellow mortals, who frowned upon us for blocking the way, that Edgar exclaimed :

" This will never do ! But I have so much to tell you. When may I call ? "

" Oh, do not stop for a conventional, icebergy call. Come to-night at seven. We will have a supper and a good talk."

I dropped all my belongings almost while I wrote my address for him on a visiting card, and we parted until evening.

I prinked and perked in rare old laces and dainty flowers as any " sweet and twenty " might have done; but still becoming my age, I told myself. I decked my little round table with shining silver and cut glass; snowy linen and good things, substantial, abundant and delectable.

We had the cosiest little supper, and the merriest chat over places and people; over things fair and strange and now so far away; of adventures weird and funny on sea and shore. In fine, we did our European sight-seeing over again for each other's benefit; but, afterwards, when we had left the table and the gleaming lights, and had drawn our chairs closer to the fire, he told me quietly, firmly, if even a wee bit sorry, of what I longed to know but should never have asked.

" I left you that night, Miss Sheldon, desperate. I walked Rome for hours. Each little incident of those few weeks came back to me again and again with thrilling force. Every glance of her wonderful eyes; every touch of her white finger tips—these last were accidental and rare—every movement, even the peculiar sound of her long dress as it drew over the tiles—you remember it?—would bring that sinking, sickened feeling—and a tight choking in my throat. I was wild—wicked—mad—for I had loved and had told her so. Miss Sheldon," with a half gasp, " why are women so cruel ? But I got over it," he said, after a minute. " It was hard work, but I was determined. I can understand, though, how young fellows go to destruction—sometimes, Miss Sheldon," in a still lower tone. " If you had not kissed me that night—for my mother's sake—I don't know what might have happened. It saved me."

His pauses were frequent. I said nothing, and again he went on.

" Women have such power for good or evil. Well, I fought—hard—for months, night and day; grew pale and thin and—contemptible; but I conquered. See !"

He sprang to his feet, laughingly squared his broad shoulders, and stretched out his strong right arm.

" Too much good, hearty flesh and blood to be pinning now, for a woman's vanity."

He smiled, a trifle bitterly, I fancied.

" It did not make you lose faith in women, Edgar ?" I asked, dumb all through till then.

" Yes, in all but two. My mother, and the woman who, in Rome, stood to me in her stead. Oh, it was cruel ! I am well of it—thoroughly cured—don't forget that; but I am not the same boy who went from home. I have lost something—I cannot express it clearly—what I mean; the power of loving, perhaps. I have been robbed."

His honest eyes had grown very dark, and there was a stern, set look about the mouth which told me, better than his words, that he was a boy no longer.

He shrugged his shoulders again—he had caught the little foreign trick half unconsciously—and said earnestly, but less bitterly :

" It was an episode, dear friend, in a life which had been a happy one always."

" And which will be in future," I said. " And faith will come again in the hands of a true-hearted woman; some bright young girl who, unknowingly herself, is holding it for you. One who shall be neither mother nor motherly friend, but your liege lady."

B. C.

COUNTING is all very sweet, but when you strike a match look out for sulphur.

A CHINESE TOPER.

A STORY is current among the Chinese of a great wine drinker who was able to sit all day at a table, and, after consuming what would have been sufficient to drive the reason out of half-a-dozen men, would rise up perfectly sober. The emperor, hearing of the fame of this deep drinker, asked him to dinner, that he might test his marvellous powers. As the story goes, the king ordered a hollow figure to be cast in bronze of the exact size and model of the man, and, as the wine was served, for each cup the guest drank a similar cup was poured into the opening at the top of the head of the image. This went on for some hours, until, at length, the bronze statue overflowed, while the guest still continued at the table, and rose from it perfectly sober.

THAT LITTLE PET.

THAT little pet
Is a brunette,
Her hair of jet
Is fine, and soft as gossamer.
At home well taught;
Her smile is sought;
Her ringlets caught,
In lasso, a philosopher.

Her lips are red
As wounds that bled,
When arrows sped
From Cupid's bow to the true-hearted.
Her words disclose
A mouth that glows
As though a rose
Would utter speech, with petals parted.

The light that lies
In her dark eyes
No midnight skies
Can outshine in their starry splendour.
Who has not oft
Seen glances soft
As stars aloft ?
But hers are soft, and sweet, and tender.

Lips undefiled
Kissed the dear child ;
On her there smiled
Another's love from Heaven descended.
A heavenly ray
Has lit her way
From day to day—
Hope in her heart with love is blended.

Oh, gift divine,
Sweet pet of mine,
A smile of thine
Would cheer me in my saddest sorrows,
And light the heart,
As beams that dart
From clouds that part,
With rays that promise bright to-morrow.

G. W. B.

STATISTICS.

THE NEW PARLIAMENT.—In his work, "the New Parliament," just issued, Mr. Saunders classifies the members as follows :—Merchants, manufacturers, mine-owners, &c., 199; ship-owners, 20; lawyers, 128; army, 82; navy, 4; diplomats, 8; chairmen railway companies, 11; journalists, 15; civil and agricultural engineers, 10; bankers, 16; tenant farmers, 5; university professors, 3; brewers and wine merchants, 13; labour, 2; member of the Royal Academy (Scotland) 1; medical professors, 5; civil and military tutor, 1; Presbyterian minister, 1; ex-dissenting minister, 1; ex-clergymen Established Church, 2; country squires, magistrates, deputy-lieutenants, sons of peers, baronets, &c., 125.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

STRAWBERRY CUSTARD.—Make a nice boiled custard of a quart of milk and the yolks of five eggs properly sweetened. Boil till it thickens to the right consistency, take it off the fire, and put in the flavouring. Take a gill of sugar and a pint of ripe strawberries; crush them together and pass through a fine strainer. Take the whites of four of the eggs, and while beating them to a stiff froth add a gill of sugar, a little at a time. Then to the sugar and egg add the sweetened strawberry juice, beating all the while to keep it stiff. This makes a beautiful float, which is to be placed on top of the custard.

DELICIOUS PINEAPPLE CUSTARD.—On the day before you wish to use the custard peel and pick to pieces with two forks a nice pineapple. Put plenty of sugar over it and set it away. Next day make a custard, and when cool mix with the pineapple, which will have become soft and luscious, and thoroughly sweetened.

STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE.—As this is the season for "Strawberry shortcake," I would like to put my method for making it on record, and ask the readers to try it: Make good pie-crust (not biscuit-crust) enough for three layers, rolled a little thicker than for pies, and bake in jelly-cake pans; prepare two quarts of berries, and stir in sugar to taste about half an hour before your crust is baked; butter the crust while hot, spread the berries between the layers, and serve immediately; no sauce is needed, as the juice of the fruit is sufficient; this may be too rich for some dyspeptics, but we consider it delicious.—H.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE painter Angeli is at present staying in the New Palace, Potsdam, being entrusted with the task of executing a portrait of Princess Victoria of Augustenburg, the betrothed of Prince William of Prussia.

A DISTINGUISHED nobleman has set up a cigar shop at the West-end.

COMMANDER CHEYNE is making superhuman exertions to get up the British Arctic Expedition. But, though he has postponed the expedition until next May, his progress is small. He wants £30,000. He has so far received only £1,600. He cannot exactly go to the North Pole for £1,600.

ONE of the London parks now boasts of the possession of a sign which reads "No fishing aloud."

ALPHONSE KARR says that in France there has not been a single great, good, or bad thing in politics, in literature or in art, which has not been inspired by a woman.

THE late Earl of Kilmorey was remarkably eccentric in many things. For a number of years he has had a handsome mausoleum in his grounds at Isleworth, containing the body of a deceased friend, and here also was a handsome coffin, prepared by his lordship's instructions, for himself. It bears an appropriate name-plate, with a blank for the date of death. The mausoleum was originally erected at Brompton Cemetery, but his lordship had it removed at an expense of £700. It is said to have cost £6,000.

THE only Minister of the late Cabinet to whom a pension has as yet been granted is Lord John Manners, who, under the Act of 1869, takes a second-class pension of £1,500 a year. It is not yet certain whether Lord Beaconsfield will resume his pension of £2,000; but in ordinary course he will do so, as there is no necessity for a Minister who has already made the application required by the statute to repeat it a second time. The other first-class pensions are drawn by Sir George Grey, Mr. Milner Gibson, and Mr. Spencer Walpole.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

PAUL.—Almost every bookshop has works on book-keeping. Any system which you can readily understand would be sufficient for your purpose. A bookseller would order works on photography for you at your request. Any of the systems will do, as they are all founded on pretty much the same principles.

V. R. P.—If the young lady told the truth what was there to be offended at? It would hardly do for you to assume, without any evidence to the fact, that she did not tell the truth. In such a case as the one you describe a young man should always act under the guidance of reason and judgment, and be careful not to let his feelings lead him astray.

SUBSCRIBER.—We do not traverse the opinion of the lawyer. It would be bad indeed if one could marry and then get out of it by remarking, "I am not James Smith, as I was married. I am John Jones. Here is my baptismal certificate to prove it." But nearly everyone who marries under an assumed name has some embarrassment afterwards. The true is the least troublesome of all statements.

JACK L.—There are few more difficult questions than that of doers to employees receiving their several salaries. On the whole the system is a bad one. We do not see that any harsh construction could be put on your particular case. But though servants have acted as "go-betweens" in undesirable ways and with mercenary objects, it would generally be as wise, even in a case of this kind, to assume that the person is only doing the duty for which his employer pays him.

MAT.—It will be enough to assent in any pleasant, informal way, such as "Very well; but we must not remain long." To be simple, natural, and truthful is the charm of manner.

WINNIE.—You may assure them all in succession that you are not fit to marry; that you must wait till you have prudence and good sense. If they doubt this statement refer them to us. We can vouch for its truth.

OLIVER.—If a gentleman receives an insult from a lady in her house, without cause, he should quietly go home—and he need not return. He will find plenty of other places to visit where he will not be insulted.

C. B.—The question of Caesar's greatness seems to have agitated men's minds for nearly two thousand years. According to Shakespeare, when Cassius was trying to spur Brutus up to take part in the assassination of Caesar, he exclaimed:

"Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed,
That he hath grown so great?"

Caesar was a man of powerful intellect and strong will. He was quick to see what was the best thing to be done, and firm and rapid in the execution of anything he determined upon. He combined many elements of greatness, any one of which would have given him distinction. He was a great statesman, a powerful public speaker, a vigorous and accomplished writer, and as a warrior he is believed to have been without a rival. He was a man of excellent common sense, and could command the devotion of his friends and also of the masses of the people. Yet, in the end, all these masterful qualities availed him nothing, and as his devoted friend Mark Anthony bent over his bleeding body he truthfully as well as mournfully exclaimed:

"Oh, mighty Caesar! dost thou lie so low?
Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,
Shrunk to this little measure?"

M. C. P.—We make no charge for such advertisements. If your communication reached us it must have been printed in the ordinary course. Perhaps you have overlooked it. However, as you have sent it to us again we will see to its insertion.

W. H.—We have little time to devote to polishing up stories sent to us "in a rough state," but even in such cases if real merit is discernible we do not grudge the necessary labour. At your early age, and with your admitted inexperience, you must not expect acceptance at first. But we will do our best in the way of advice, although we could not promise a cheque before you submit your MSS. If we accept a story of course we pay for it according to the ability displayed.

BEATRICE and BESSY would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Beatrice is dark, medium height, of a loving disposition, dark eyes, fond of home and music. Bessy is seventeen, fair, hazel eyes, tall, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children.

ANNE, twenty-five, loving, would like to correspond with a young man from thirty to thirty-five with a view to matrimony, petty officer in the Royal Navy preferred.

R. F. N., twenty-two, brown hair, hazel eyes, medium height, fond of home and music, dark, would like to correspond with a young lady about eighteen, loving, good-looking.

EDMUND, twenty-one, dark, grey eyes, of a loving disposition, would like to correspond with a young lady. Respondent must be about nineteen, tall, good-looking, loving.

WILL, twenty-five, medium height, fair, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony. Respondents must be about twenty, dark, good-looking, fond of music.

ALFRED, FRED, and ROLAND, three friends, would like to correspond with three young ladies with a view to matrimony. Alfred is twenty-two, fair, medium height, fond of music. Fred is twenty, tall, dark, good-looking. Roland, tall, fair, handsome, and is in a good position. Respondents must be tall.

BECKY, CARRIE, and LIZZIE, three friends, would like to correspond with three sergeants in the army. Becky is twenty-two, tall, dark, fond of dancing. Carrie is twenty, medium height, fair, fond of children. Lizzie is seventeen, tall, fair, and of a loving disposition. Respondents must be about the age of twenty-one.

WE CANNOT HELP THE DEAD.

We cannot help the dead—they need no aid—
They're through with life's delights—they're
through with weeping—

The sexton hachymose for them has made
A royal couch, wherein they're sweetly sleep-
ing.

We mourn our dead—we honour them in earth,
But time to kill our grief is ever striving,
And all the tears we shed are of less worth
Than one kind smile bestowed upon the living.

We cannot help the dead—their needs are o'er—
They've pass'd the troub'ous climax of life's
story—

Their unchained souls have reached the shining
shore,

And move resplendent 'mid celestial glory.
But when you meet a pilgrim sick and sore,
Bending beneath a load of earthly trouble,
For him let fall your tears, on him outpour
Your sympathy and love with measure double.

Poor Robert Burns—Scotia's immortal bard—
No one from poverty's keen pang would save
him—

But when he calmly slept in the churchyard,
A rare and costly monument they gave him.
They praised his genius, sang his melodies,
And suffer'd him at last to die alone;
They never tried his burden hard to ease,
He asked for bread—his friends gave him a
stone.*

Weep for the living—those whose wants are
real—

The hapless wanderers unhouse, unfed—
Believe them now, while they have hearts to
feel,

You cannot succour them when they are dead.
'Tis natural to mourn the loved and lost,
But slightest aid to them we cannot give—
Weep, then—be tears your chiefest cost,
And save your charity for those who live.

F. C. S.

ALEXANDER and FREDERICK, two friends, eighteen and twenty, would like to correspond with two young ladies about the same age.

DORA and EVELINE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Dora is twenty-one, brown hair, dark eyes. Eveline is fond of music, good-looking, fair, hazel eyes. Respondents must be between nineteen and twenty-two, fond of home, loving.

CLARE and ANNIE, two friends, wish to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Clare is twenty-four, brown hair, hazel eyes, tall, dark, fond of home and children, good-looking. Annie is twenty-one, light brown hair and eyes, medium height, fair, good-looking.

W. W., twenty-three, medium height, dark, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony. Respondent must be fond of music, good-looking, of a loving disposition, tall.

AGNES and ALICE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Agnes is nineteen, tall, dark, good-looking. Alice is twenty-one, loving disposition and good-looking, both domesticated. Respondents must be tall, dark, good-looking.

ANNIE LAURIE, nineteen, medium height, brown hair and eyes, good-looking, fond of music and dancing, would like to correspond with a young gentleman about twenty-two, tall, fond of home.

* It is said that when the monument was erected over the remains of the poet, his mother went out to look at it, and after regarding it tearfully for awhile, she said, with a deep sigh, "Ah, Rob, Rob, ye asked them for bread, and they ha' gien ye a stonie!"

CONSTANCE and LAURA, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Constance is twenty-two, of a loving disposition, fond of home, tall, fair, domesticated. Laura is nineteen, loving, fond of home and children, tall.

ELIZA W., seventeen, brown hair, hazel eyes, fair, fond of music, medium height, would like to correspond with a young man about twenty-one.

ELISIE and CLARICE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Elsie is twenty-one, good-looking, tall, fond of music and dancing. Clarice is twenty, fond of home and children, domesticated, tall.

ISABELLA and ANNA, two friends, would like to correspond with two seamen in the Royal Navy. Isabella is tall, dark, of a loving disposition. Anna is tall, fair, fond of home and music.

N. D. and E. B., two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. N. D. is twenty-three, medium height, fair, brown hair, hazel eyes, handsome. E. B. is twenty-one, dark hair and eyes, thoroughly domesticated, fair, fond of home and children. Respondents must be between twenty-two and twenty-five, medium height, fair, fond of music.

ROSAMOND and LOVELY ROSA, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Rosamond is twenty-three, tall, fair, blue eyes. Lovely Rosa is eighteen, medium height, dark, brown eyes, of a loving disposition. Respondents must be between twenty-two and twenty-five, of a loving disposition, good-looking, tall.

K. W. G. and E. K. F., two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. K. W. G. is twenty-three, dark, loving, medium height, fond of home and music, brown hair and eyes. E. K. F. is twenty-one, loving, dark, fond of music and dancing, tall, hair and eyes.

C. S. and L. W., two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies. C. S. is twenty-three, light hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition. L. W. is twenty-three, dark hair, hazel eyes, and loving. Respondents must be fond of home and children, good-looking.

AMELIA and POLLY, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Aurora is nineteen, fair, fond of home and music. Polly is nineteen, fair, tall, fond of home and music. Respondents must be about twenty, medium height, dark.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

HENRY is responded to by—Gipsy, nineteen, tall, dark, hair, hazel eyes.

CHARLES GEORGE by—Maud, sixteen, tall, fair, good-looking, fond of music and dancing.

TOPMASTHEAD by—Kate J. W.

PORT ROYAL TON by—Minnie C. P., dark, medium height, domesticated.

W. S. by—Annie, twenty-three, tall, dark, good-looking, and of a loving disposition.

RAW NECK by—Marratta, twenty-two, tall, dark, very affectionate.

HAVE GOT by—Florence P., nineteen, fair, medium height, blue eyes, fond of home.

FLAT FOOT by—Maggie, twenty, dark brown hair, blue eyes, medium height, loving disposition.

NELLY by—S. W., seaman in the Royal Navy, dark, good-looking.

GABRIEL by—Violet Mabel, nineteen, tall, dark hair and eyes.

CLARA by—Edward, eighteen, tall, dark, fond of music and dancing, loving.

W. R. and K. K. by—Rose, twenty-four, medium height, good-looking, fond of music. Fanny, twenty, tall, dark eyes, loving disposition, fond of children.

ALL the back Numbers, Parts, and Volumes of the *LONDON READER* are in print, and may be had at the Office, 33, Strand; or will be sent to any part of the United Kingdom post free for Three Halfpence, Eightpence, and Five Shillings and Eightpence each.

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NOTICE.—Part 211 (June) Now Ready, Price Six-pence; post free, Eightpence.

N.B.—Correspondents must address their Letters to the Editor of the *LONDON READER*, 33, Strand, W.C.

† We cannot undertake to return Rejected Manuscripts. As they are sent to us voluntarily authors should retain copies.

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